

Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

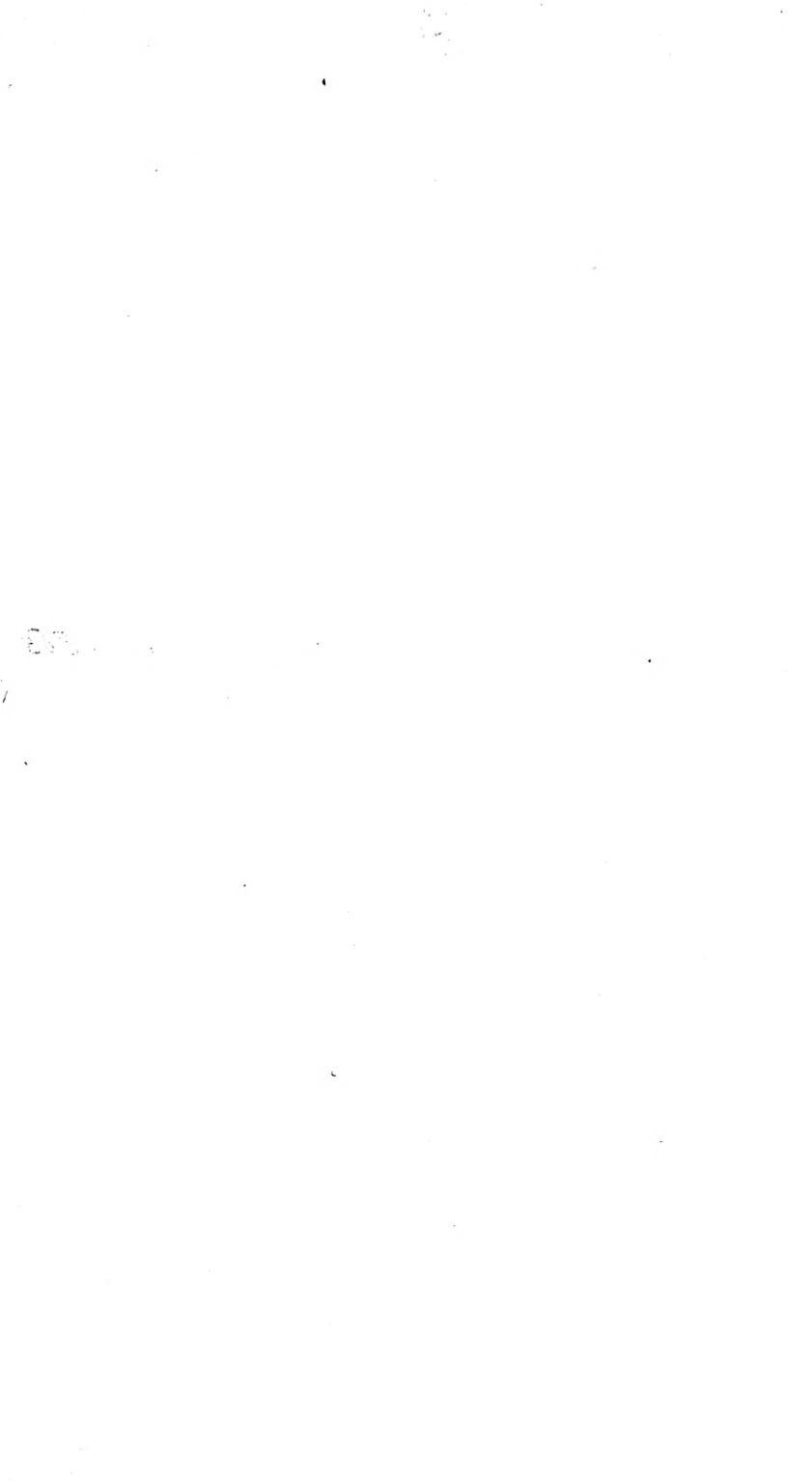
Presented by Rev. A. A. Baker - 1853

Division..... SCC

Section 2722

Shelf.....

Number.....



SERMONS

ON

THE PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE,

THE

FASTS AND FESTIVALS

OF

The Church,

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS,

AND VARIOUS PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

RIGHT REV. THEODORE DEHON, D.D.

RECTOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON;
AND BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH-CAROLINA.

TOGETHER WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR, AND A SERMON
PREACHED ON ACCOUNT OF HIS DEATH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

A NEW EDITION, CORRECTED.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. AND J. RIVINGTON,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
AND WATERLOO-PLACE, PALL-MALL.

1825.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY R. GILBERT,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

CONTENTS

OF

VOL. II.



SERMON XLIV.

ON EASTER-DAY.

ST. LUKE, xxiv. 5, 6.

PAGE

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen 1

SERMON XLV.

ON EASTER-DAY.

PSALM cxviii. 24.

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it 9

SERMON XLVI.

ON EASTER-DAY.

ACTS, iv. 33.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. 21

SERMON XLVII.

ON EASTER-DAY.

1 THESSALONIANS, iv. 14.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him 33

SERMON XLVIII.

ON THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

COLOSSIANS, ii. 10.

And ye are complete in him. 40

SERMON XLIX.

ON THE ASCENSION.

HEBREWS, ix. 24.

	PAGE
For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us	52

SERMON L.

ON THE ASCENSION.

HEBREWS, ii. 9.

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour	61
---	----

SERMONS LI, LII.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

ST. JOHN, iv. 14.

But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life	73, 85
---	--------

SERMON LIII.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

1 THESSALONIANS, v. 19.

Quench not the Spirit	97
-----------------------------	----

SERMON LIV.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

ACTS, ii. 33.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear	107
---	-----

SERMON LV.

ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

ST. JUDE, 3.

That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints	116
---	-----

SERMON LVI.

ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

I ST. JOHN, v. 7.

There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one 128

SERMON LVII.

ON THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

HEBREWS, i. 14.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? 138

SERMON LVIII.

ON THE FESTIVAL OF ALL SAINTS.

REVELATION, vii. 9, 13—18.

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.—And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes 151

SERMON LIX.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS, ix. 19—21.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ

in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name?.. 162

SERMON LX.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

ST. MATTHEW, xi. 11.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist 176

SERMONS LXI, LXII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PETER.

ST. MATTHEW, xvi. 17.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven..185, 195

SERMON LXIII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

ST. MATTHEW, ix. 9.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him..... 204

SERMON LXIV.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

ST. JOHN, xiii. 23.

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved..... 214

SERMONS LXV, LXVI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

2 ST. PETER, ii. 15.

Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.....226, 235

SERMON LXVII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ABSALOM.

2 SAMUEL, xvi. 15.

PAGE

And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel,
came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him 242

SERMON LXVIII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

ACTS, viii. 39.

He went on his way rejoicing 255

SERMON LXIX.

ON THE CHARACTER OF CORNELIUS.

ACTS, x. 31.

Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had
in remembrance in the sight of God 264

SERMON LXX.

DELIVERED AT THE CONSECRATION OF TRINITY CHURCH,
COLUMBIA.

1 KINGS, viii. 66.

On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they
blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and
glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had
done for Israel his servant, and for David his people. . . 275

SERMON LXXI.

ON BEHALF OF THE 'PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTH CAROLINA.'

ST. MATTHEW, ii. 11.

And when they had opened their treasures, they present-
ed unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 290

SERMON LXII.

FOR A COLLECTION IN AID OF THE FUNDS OF THE 'PROTESTANT
EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY
IN SOUTH-CAROLINA.'

NEHEMIAH, xiii. 14.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this; and wipe

not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof..... 304

SERMON LXXIII.

A FAST SERMON.

JEREMIAH, xviii. 7, 8.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them..... 320

SERMON LXXIV.

A THANKSGIVING SERMON.

PSALM, c. 4.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name..... 334

SERMON LXXV.

ON DEATH.

JOB, vii. 16.

I would not live alway..... 346

SERMON LXXVI.

ON DEATH.

ISAIAH, lxiv. 6.

We all do fade as a leaf..... 358

SERMON LXXVII.

ON DEATH.

ISAIAH, xl. 6—8.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth: the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever..... 364

SERMON LXXVIII.

ON THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.

2 SAMUEL, xii. 22, 23.

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me 376

SERMON LXXIX.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

PSALM, xxiii. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me 384

SERMON LXXX.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

JOB, xxxv. 14.

Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him. 399

SERMON LXXXI.

ON THE MISERIES OF LIFE.

ST. JOHN, xix. 41.

There was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre. 409

SERMON LXXXII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF SETTLED PRINCIPLES IN RELIGION.

ST. JOHN, vi. 67, 68.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life 417

SERMON LXXXIII.

ON THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

EXODUS, ii. 9.

Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages 427

SERMON LXXXIV.

ON SOLICITUDE FOR THE PROSPERITY OF RELIGION.

I SAMUEL, iv. 13.

+ For his heart trembled for the ark of God..... PAGE
442

SERMON LXXXV.

ON FAMILY WORSHIP.

JOB, i. 5.

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually 452

SERMON LXXXVI.

ON THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

ST. LUKE, x. 42.

But one thing is needful 461

SERMON LXXXVII.

ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

ST. LUKE, xiii. 18, 19.

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it..... 473

SERMON LXXXVIII.

ON THE HEALING OF THE BLIND.

ST. LUKE, xviii. 37.

+ And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. 484

SERMON LXXXIX.

ON THE RICH AND THE GREAT BEGGING THE BODY OF JESUS.

ST. MATTHEW, xxvii. 58.

He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus 493

SERMON XC.

ON THE COVENANTED MERCIES OF GOD.

REVELATION, iv. 3.

	PAGE
And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald	501

SERMON XCI.

ON THE DANGERS OF YOUTH.

PROVERBS, vii. 7.

I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding	510
--	-----

SERMON XCII.

ON THE DISTRESSES OF THE POOR IN WINTER.

ST. MARK, xiii. 18.

Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter	521
---	-----



A DISCOURSE

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF THE RIGHT REV.
 BISHOP DEHON, BY THE REV. CHRISTOPHER E. GADSDEN,
 RECTOR OF ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON.

REVELATION, ii. 10.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life	529
---	-----



SERMON XLIV.

ON EASTER-DAY.

ST. LUKE XXIV. 5, 6.

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.

THE Church, this morning, hastens, with the amiable women whose affection for Jesus was stronger than death, to the sepulchre of their departed Lord. At the mouth of the tomb, they were met by two men of wonderful appearance; their countenances like lightning, and their raiment white as snow. As they stoop to look into the sepulchre, these messengers from the court of heaven, for such they are, address to them tidings, which disperse their sorrows and fill their bosoms with rapturous joy: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." "Come see the place where the Lord lay^a." They descend into the sepulchre. Jesus is not there. They see the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. They remember that thus it was written, that when He had suffered, He should rise from the dead, the third day. Transported with admiration, they send forth their praises unto God.

^a Matt. xxviii. 6.

This resurrection of Him, whom we have lately contemplated, offering Himself upon the cross for our sins, is a subject for mutual congratulations to the whole human race. The memory of it is worthy to be kept a feast for ever, in all their generations.

For ages, mankind had been subject to the dreadful dominion of the king of terrors. The dismal grave waited for them in awful succession. It closed upon them, and they were heard of no more. Whether they had any continuance of being, beyond this impenetrable confine of life, was a question of doubtful speculation. It is probable that some knowledge of their destiny had been revealed to the first men, of which, as of other important revelations, we find some tattered and defaced remnants, in the heathen world. The most virtuous of the philosophers gathered from these, and their own reflections, a sentiment that another state of existence awaited them. But it amounted only to a hope; a hope dubious and lingering, like the light of the expiring taper; and this so remote, that it had no influence upon the mass of mankind. They saw their fellow beings descend irrecoverably into the tomb. They followed in their turns, and the grim monarch of the dreary domain seemed as sovereign as he was inexorable. It was reserved for the blessed Author of our faith, to break his sceptre, and to bring "life and immortality to light, through His" most precious "Gospel^b."

As an exemplification of the most interesting truth, which the human mind can consider, the resurrection of Christ ranks before all other events, in the annals of our world. Whatever conceptions the more considerate of the heathens acquired, respecting the continuance of their souls in being, after the

^b 2 Tim. i. 10.

present life; of the resurrection of the body they had no idea. This they relinquished for ever to corruption. Among the chosen people of God, with whom, as in a last receptacle, He deposited the truths which the world would not retain in their knowledge, some sentiments of this mystery were promulgated. That David and the Prophets were acquainted with it, is evident from their predictions of the Messiah's resurrection; and Job felt its consoling influences upon his heart, when he rejoiced that "though after his skin worms would destroy his body, yet in his flesh he should see God^c." Still, however, the knowledge which the Jews had of this matter, was obscure and contested. It is to the sepulchre of the Arimathean, that the children of men must come to behold, in a clear and convincing light, the interesting truth; that in these forms, in which we have known each other, and in which our nature has been known, we shall rise to renovated life, after sleeping an appointed time in the chambers of the dead. It is here we may behold a Brother, made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, and over whom death had exerted the utmost and most cruel extent of his power, bursting the adamantine fetters which the tyrant had imposed; coming forth from the grave in the form, in which He had once dwelt among men; seen, heard, and handled by the companions of His former days^d. Nor is His resurrection unconnected with our own. He rises, as "the Captain of our salvation^e," as "the first fruits of them that slept^f." In His resurrection, the Everlasting Father, who hath the keys of life and death, hath given us an earnest and pledge, that he will also quicken our mortal bodies, and make us to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.

^c Job xix. 26.

^e Heb. ii. 10.

^d 1 John i. 1.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 20.

Need I now set before you the consolations and joys, which spring from the assurance of our future resurrection? Need I demand of you, considerate men, whether there is any other light than that which flows from the knowledge of man's immortality, in which there is meaning or satisfaction, consistent with the wisdom or with the goodness of God, in this present promiscuous and perishable state? Need I, ye modest pilgrims in the paths of virtue, inquire of you, what encouragement you have to perseverance in your arduous course, but the animating assurance that a book of remembrance is kept, and that "your Father which seeth in secret will" one day "reward you openly?" Need I appeal to you, sons and daughters of sorrow, who are bowed down to the dust by the dissolution of the friends who were dear to you, and tender as the apple of your eyes, whether they have left any thing behind them so soothing and precious, as the knowledge, that they are not struck out of the scale of being; and the hope, that you may again enjoy them in a better world? Need I inquire of you, virtuous widow, from whom death hath torn the partner of your cares and your joys; of you, dutiful child, whose heart is yet wrung at the remembrance of a parent gone down to the dust; of you, disconsolate mother, who bewail the darling of your hopes, untimely taken from your fond embrace; of you, affectionate sister, who sigh for some beloved brother, whom you shall see here no more? Need I call upon you all, my brethren, who are journeying rapidly onward with me to that bourne, whence no traveller returns, to say soberly whether our hearts might not die within us as we approached the grave, if an utter extinction of our being were about to take place upon its brink?

No : I need not. The consolations and joys, which flow from the prospect of an immortal existence, you have felt and appreciated, on every occasion which has required them, since you received the Gospel. Among the sincerest offerings which you bring to the God of heaven, are your constant thanksgivings for “ the hope of glory ^h.”

But it may be questioned, whether we do fully and habitually consider, how much our joy in believing the resurrection of the dead, is connected with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Take this away, and all would be uncertainty. But for this instance and pledge of the fact, with what painful hesitation would our minds labour over the dubious inquiry, whether the vital spark, when once extinguished, could be rekindled in these perishable frames ! But for our relation to the Redeemer, and our adoption by the Father for His sake, how would the consciousness of our sins, and of the little value of our race among the immense productions of His hand ; damp our expectations of being fostered into an eternal state by His power, who, if He needed, might only speak, and His universe would instantly be filled with far more excellent and purer creatures ! In a word, how would our thoughts waver with all the fluctuation of heathen hope ; what clouds and darkness would be raised over the grave by our fears, our fancies, and our foe, did not our faith remind us, that we are purchased with the blood of the Son of God, and that, “ because He lives, we shall live also ⁱ !” It is the resurrection of the Saviour which gives a basis and stability to the expectation of another life. And this it does so completely and permanently, that among Christians there is scarcely room for the question ; “ Why should it be thought a

^h Col. i. 27.

ⁱ John xiv. 19.

thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead^k?"

Ungrateful it is in those, who have received such an inestimable gift as the hope of immortality, to "kick" against the just and all-wise Donor, because of the way in which He hath chosen to testify its reality. What mean the complaints of the partial appearance of the risen Saviour? Is it not enough, that we have more evidence of the truth of this fact, than of any of the articles of belief, to which our minds are daily assenting? Is it not enough, that His resurrection was attested by "above five hundred brethren at once," to the greater part of whom the historian of it appeals, as still living^l? Is it not enough, that it rallied a disheartened, scattered, and feeble band of followers, and inspired them with a confidence, fortitude, and virtue, which nothing could restrain or subdue? Is it not enough, that the witnesses of the event were proverbial for integrity and simplicity, and exhibited all that consistency and correspondent behaviour, which ever characterize the promulgators of truth? Is it not enough, that without wealth to support, or power to befriend them, and without room for any of the motives to deceive, by which the mind is in such cases actuated, they asserted the fact before great and small, with uniform harmony and perseverance, and willingly evinced the sincerity of their belief in it, by sealing their declarations with their blood? Is it not enough, that the power of His resurrection alone established His Church against the opposition of policy and vice, and has been acknowledged and felt, in every age, by the wisest and most virtuous of the human race? I know not upon what ground it is assumed, that the Most High is obliged to give

^k Acts xxvi. 8.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 6.

the utmost demonstration of any truth, which He sees fit to require His moral subjects to believe. And with respect to the Jews, as they had disregarded "Moses and the Prophets," we have no reason to suppose, they would have been persuaded by one risen "from the dead^m."

We stand, then, my hearers, contemplating a joyous and most important event; an event pregnant with consequences of unspeakable magnitude to the human race. "The Lord is risen," and our nature is risen in Him, "and our life is hid with Him in Godⁿ." Shake off then, O Zion, the mourning, in which the crucifixion had enveloped thee, Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. Take to yourselves, Christians, a song of victory; and be ye all attired in robes of praise. What gratitude to God should be in your hearts; what Hallelujahs to your Redeemer should be on your lips; what transports of joy should pervade your souls, while you contemplate the king of terrors stript of his sceptre, and the hour appointed, in which himself shall be bound, and the captives of his dominion be all released! Behold, "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God^o." Death shall be destroyed, and from the innumerable prisons in which he hath confined them, the human race shall be at once set free. But ah! amongst the rising, what means this gloom, amazement, and horror, with which the countenances of so many are overspread? Alas! they have had no part in the regeneration; they are covered with the guilt of their evil deeds; they are rising to shame and contempt; they are coming forth to be consigned to everlasting perdition. Awful, afflicting view! O let us turn from it to those

^m Luke xvi. 31.

ⁿ Col. iii. 3.

^o 1 Thess. iv. 16.

upon whose faces peace has spread her smiles ; into whose hands angels are putting palms of victory ; unto whom seraphs are bearing white robes from the wardrobe of heaven ; whom the Lamb is conducting into the presence of God. Behold ! He presents them triumphantly to the Ancient of Days. These are they, saith their Leader to His Father, who have embraced Thy covenant and kept Thy word. In the days of their flesh, it was their anxious care to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. And now they plead no merit before Thee, but ask acceptance in My name. The Son ceases. A pulse of joy shoots through the hosts of heaven, as the Everlasting Father smiles upon His offspring, brought back unto glory. Children of the regeneration, saith He, “good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord^p.” They range through regions of bliss. They quaff of the rivers of everlasting pleasure. They eat of the trees of immortality in the gardens of God. They remember their unworthiness, and look back upon their toils and their sorrows ; but the hand of the Almighty hath wiped away all tears from their eyes^q. Gracious Redeemer, in this blessed company, grant, through Thy mercy, we may all be found ! If we are not already Thine, O make us so, and leave us not to any vice or error, which shall compel Thee to reject us when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.

^p Matt. xxv. 21.

^q Rev. xxi. 4



SERMON XLV.

ON EASTER-DAY.

PSALM cxviii. 24.

This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

WHEN light first shone through the darkness of Chaos, awfully magnificent must have been the scene. Then was the first natural day. But how incomparably more grand was the display, when life first shone through the darkness of the tomb ! Then dawned immortal day. The sun, which rose in the lustre of the former, dispelled an unfelt and material gloom ; illumined and animated a world of bodies ; is limited in its influences, and will, at some future period, set for ever. The Sun, which rose in the lustre of the latter, dispelled an afflicting and intellectual gloom ; illumined and animated a world of spirits ; is in its influences unbounded, and will, in meridian glory, be eternal. Well did the earliest Christians unite the commemoration of the two creations, and hallow the first day of the week, as the Lord's Day. With still more striking propriety may the Church, at the annual recurrence of the Easter festival, adopt the exultation of the Psalmist, uttered as he prophetically contemplated the resurrection of the Messiah : " This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

Suitably to improve the season, and to illustrate the propriety of the exultation in the text, it will be my endeavour, in the following discourse, to show how great sources of joy and gladness were opened unto us, by the event which we this day commemorate. The extensiveness of the subject renders me fearful of being tedious to your patience. But it is more important than any other, upon which you can bestow your attention; and it shall be my aim, to render the discourse as concise and perspicuous, as the scope of it will admit. In no way, perhaps, can this better be accomplished, than by considering the resurrection of our Lord first, as the grand evidence of the truth of our religion, and secondly, as the genuine earnest of our immortality.

It will appear an august evidence of our religion, if we contemplate it, first, as the greatest and most decisive miracle of which we can form an idea. Miracles are credentials which we should naturally expect, would accompany a mission from Heaven. Hence, the Jews, who expected an extraordinary Personage, sought after signs; and to pretences of these, Gentile impostors have always resorted. Of all miracles, the restoration of life to the dead is the most astonishing and satisfactory. To recall the spirit, when once it has fled; to rekindle the vital spark, when once it has expired; to resuscitate the corpse over which the desolating hand of death hath once passed: can be the act of Him alone, who holds, as an unalienable prerogative, the attribute of Omnipotence. Other wonders may be attributed to art, to sleight, or to infernal agency. But the keys of life and death are in the hands of the Almighty; and from Him can in no way be obtained. So uncontrollable is this miracle, that the pagan Pliny imagined it impossible to any of his gods, and the sceptical Porphyry declared, if he could credit

one instance of it, he would renounce his unbelief. If then to restore life to another, be such unanswerable testimony of authority from Heaven, what shall we say of the resurrection of Christ? To other cases of resuscitation of the dead, obstinacy might object that there was connivance between the subject and the author of the miracle. But here the fact, when ascertained, admitted of no evasion. The subject of the miracle was deprived of life by a public execution, and deposited in a tomb, which His foes studiously secured, "sealing the stone, and setting a watch^a." The aid of no second person was employed in His resurrection. His disciples did not pretend that they had raised Him; which they certainly would have done, had they accomplished a fraud. But our Saviour was the author of His own resurrection. The captive of the tomb burst His fetters by the energy of His Divine omnipotence, and Himself reanimated His sleeping dust. This surely was the greatest and most decisive miracle, of which we can form an idea; and is the corner-stone of the solid base, upon which Christianity stands.

Its importance, as an evidence of the truth of our religion, will further appear, if we consider it as that, to which our Saviour made His ultimate appeal; and on which He rested the truth of all that He delivered. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up^b." The candour of our blessed Lord was conspicuous, in declaring His intention previous to His death, and in pointing to a miracle which, while it should vouch for His authority, would actually exemplify the principal doctrines which He taught, of His divinity, the acceptance of His sacrifice with the Father, and the abolition of death. He had so openly predicted His resurrection, and so

^a Matth. xxvii. 66.

^b John ii. 19.

firmly referred to it as His best voucher, that His foes took every measure to prevent an imposture. They ran to Pilate, and reminded him of the “deceiver’s” assertion^c. Pilate recollected it; and bade them use every precaution. And, yesterday, we saw them strenuously engaged in making the sepulchre as sure as they could. And had they confuted His predictions; had the tomb retained its noble prisoner; had death held Christ in fetters, as other men, who could have felt the “fulness of joy” in believing^d? Great as are the other evidences of His religion, they were insufficient to sustain the faith even of His Apostles. Death scarcely took possession of their Master, before some, ashamed and intimidated, shrunk from sight; others, sad and sorrowing, were journeying to their former occupations; and but for the tenderness of women, there had been none to visit His remains. Could His adversaries have produced His corpse after the lapse of the third day, a fatal blow would, in all probability, have been given to the faith of our Redeemer. And this we learn from the records of the times, they were equally anxious and determined to do. But “why do the heathen so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision^e.” He comes forth triumphantly from the tomb, at the time appointed, and His exact fulfilment of His promise leaves incredulity without a plea. It rallied the disheartened disciples, and inspired that unconquerable zeal, with which the Church was established. It reduced the adversaries of Christ to their first and

^c Matt. xxvii. 63.

^d Psalm xvi. 11.

^e Ibid. ii. 1, 2, 4.

last resort, bribery and lies^f. It gave to the Christian fabric that finishing stroke, without which its foundation would have been unstable, and its consistence and majesty very incomplete.

The importance of the resurrection, as an evidence of our religion, will appear still greater, if we consider it, as capable of removing the principal reluctances, which the proud mind of man may feel at embracing the Christian faith. The doctrine of Christ crucified is the doctrine which unbelievers find it most difficult to receive. No one can deny, that human nature is prone to vice, and that vice is intrinsically odious. It is seen and felt every where. No one can doubt the need which mankind have of an instructor. It has been acknowledged in all ages. No one can question the possibility of another state, and immortal life. Of these the soul has a strong presage, and ardent desire. No one can disregard a proffer of pardon from his Creator, and overtures of His mercy and favour. It is what man has every where sought with trembling hope, and soothing devices. But there is something in the Almighty's laying such sufferings upon an innocent being; something in the Son of God's enduring all the abasements of humanity, and expiring in agonies upon a cross, at which infidel reason revolts. It is a hard saying; they cannot bear it^g. This however is an uncandid way of judging of Christianity. It is to condemn a system, upon a view only of one of its parts. To fix our thoughts upon the crucifixion, and disbelieve, without connecting it with the resurrection, is surely an unfair examination of the Gospel. Would it be right, from a contemplation of the earth, when the shades of night are spread over it, to pronounce the world dark and gloomy, without

^f Matt. xxviii. 12—15.

^g John vi. 60.

continuing our contemplation to the effulgent glory which is diffused by the rising of the sun? Every objection to the cross vanishes before the grandeur and felicity of the resurrection. The Son of God appears no longer abased; His humiliations no longer severe or useless; the exactions of the Almighty from Him no longer incompatible with the most affectionate goodness; when we consider Christ Jesus, "for the suffering of death," thus "crowned with glory and honour^h." The Jews, not regarding the satisfactory testimony which the Lord had promised, exclaimed, while He hung upon the tree, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Himⁱ." Had their obstinacy permitted them to have gone with the wonder-struck watch to His tomb, they would have found even stronger demonstration than that which they demanded. But their eyes were blinded, that they should not see. God grant, that the film may soon be removed from their sight; and they enabled to confess in the risen Saviour, a greater and more glorious Messiah, than they have idly expected! But more deplorable blindness has existed in the Christian world. The deluded Paine, from whom thousands have received a cup of poison, deadly as the most depraved nature could compose, has with insolent infidelity averred, that the story of the crucifixion is too cruel and ridiculous, to be told by Christians to their children! Had he humbly contemplated it in its connection with the event, which millions of the best of his race are, to-day, commemorating, he might have thought it a story so full of compassion, wisdom, and sublimity, that angels might ponder it with admiration. He is passed to the place of his account; and far be it

^h Heb. ii. 9.

ⁱ Matt. xxvii. 42.

from us, my friends, to load his followers with epithets of opprobrium and malevolence. Would heaven, they might be led from the cross to the sepulchre of our Lord; and, beholding the seeming contemptibleness of the former, lost in the majesty of the latter, there render homage to Him, "at whose name every knee shall" be compelled to "bow;" and whom "every tongue shall" one day "confess to be Lord, to the glory of God the Father^k." The triumph of Christ over the awful monarch, whose sceptre had for ages dealt destruction through the world, is sufficient to satisfy the doubts, and remove the reluctance of every mind. When by means of death He overcomes death, and "destroys him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^l;" this fruit of the crucifixion commends it as the wisdom of God. The despised "Nazarene^m," the humiliated victim, is here "declared to be the Son of God with powerⁿ." Amidst the glorious lustre of the resurrection, the cross no longer appears either "a stumbling-block," or "foolishness^o."

Such are some of the considerations, which show that the event we to-day commemorate, is the grand, and indispensable evidence of the truth of our holy religion. Which leads me to observe, secondly, that it is to be considered as establishing for us the best joys of life, and especially as the earnest of our own immortality.

The most confirmed sceptic will, I believe, allow, that Christianity to those, who feel satisfied of its truth, is the source of such happiness as cannot elsewhere be found. Its tidings of joy, and its inimitable instructions, the truths it delivers, and the prospects it opens: how happily are they adapted to

^k Phil. ii. 10, 11.

^l Heb. ii. 14.

^m Matt. ii. 23.

ⁿ Rom. i. 4.

^o 1 Cor. i. 23.

the perplexities and sorrows, to the necessities and desires, of our nature! I might speak of the provision it makes for our pardon and salvation. I might mention the revelation it gives concerning God, and His worship. I might state its tendency to promote tranquillity in the bosom, satisfaction in the mind, and order, peace, and felicity in the world. I might adduce the ideas, which swelled the notes of the heavenly choir, as they chanted at the birth of its Author, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men^p." I might take the light of Prophecy in my hand, and carry you forward to the blissful scenes of the consummated influences of this religion, when "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose^q." Recalling your attention to these things, and reminding you that we have seen them deriving from the resurrection their confirmation, I might demand, whether on this day "which the Lord hath made," we may not well be filled with holy exultation and ardent praise? But the time elapsing too rapidly, to permit me to dwell on each of these topics, I hasten to one doctrine of our religion, which, on this occasion, is peculiarly pertinent, and on every occasion most interesting. It is "through the Gospel," that "life and immortality are brought to light^r." What nature obscurely denied; what reason feebly hoped; what virtue earnestly supplicated, is here clearly revealed. As an essential part of Christianity, this joyful doctrine shares in that general certainty which is given to all the truths of the Gospel, by the resurrection of its Author from the dead. It were enough, to read upon the pages, which this event hath stamped with the seal of Divine authority, that

^p Luke ii. 14.

^q Isaiah xxxv. 1.

^r 2 Tim. i. 10.

the time shall be, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the voice" of the Son of God, "and come forth^s;" "when this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality^t." For who shall not be satisfied with the declaration of God?

But on account of the anxiety of our nature, and the weakness of our faith, God hath graciously condescended to grant; that this truth should be exemplified as well as taught. With all the hopes and expectations; which nature can give him, man longs for evidence of the possibility of his future being: He stands gazing upon the remains of mortality in the chambers of the dead, and scarcely dares to ask, "Can these dry bones live^u?" His mind roves through the regions of visible space calling anxiously; Spirits of the departed, where are you? He sees that the plant perishes, and is renewed from its seed. He sees that the sun sets, and rises on the morrow. He sees that nature fades in winter, and in spring is renewed. But "man giveth up the ghost, and where is he^x?" Some evidence, in fact, that the dead may live, would be to his soul welcome and enlivening, as the light of the morning. This evidence Christ, in His resurrection, has furnished. One in our own nature and form has lain in the grave, the prey of death; and from the dominion of this king of terrors, has come forth triumphantly in new life, and is passed into heaven, leaving us assurance, that He who raised Him up, will "also quicken our mortal bodies^y."

Let it not be objected, that His ashes were entire and composed, while those of other men are com-mixed and scattered. The omniscience of the Deity

^s John v. 28, 29.

^t 1 Cor. xv. 53.

^u Ezek. xxxvii. 3.

^x Job xiv. 10.

^y Rom. viii. 11.

can accurately discriminate every atom, and know to what body it peculiarly belongs. Does not “He tell the number of the stars, and call them all by their names^z?” Does not He bring forth from the dust the various tribes of plants, reserving to each its proper form, and qualities, and season? Does He not annually restore to every flower its infinitely fine and varied hues, and give “to every seed its own body^a?” Can He then be at a loss to know, what matter must give to any person his proper identity, “or with what body” every man should “come^b?” Nor is His power less than His wisdom. No single atom in the universe can secrete itself from His view; nor for a single moment resist His word. “Whither shall they go from His Spirit? or whither shall they go from His presence? If they climb up into heaven, He is there: if they go down to hell, He is there also. If they take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there” His power guides and will control them^c. Having resolved that, “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive^d ;” He holds the infinity of particles, of which at the resurrection men must be composed, under the power of His might, each ready to take its proper station, when “the trumpet shall sound^e,” and “the Captain of our salvation^f” shall give the great command. “Behold,” saith He, “I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me^g?”

Now the resurrection of Christ is not only an exemplification of the possibility of our own resurrection, but also ‘a pledge to assure us thereof.’ He rose as “the first-born among many brethren^h.”

^z Psalm cxlvii. 4.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 38.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 35.

^c Psalm cxxxix. 6—9.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 52.

^f Heb. ii. 10.

^g Jer. xxxii. 27.

^h Rom. viii. 29.

He is taken as “the first fruits of them that sleptⁱ,” into the temple of God, an earnest and consecration of the mighty harvest, which shall be gathered in the end of the world, from all the beds of death. By raising Him up from the dead, God hath testified His acceptance of the expiation He hath made for sin: and what but sin gave death a claim to our race? By raising Him up from the dead, God hath given us assurance, that He hath appointed Him to “judge the world in righteousness^k?” And shall they not then be gathered before Him? By raising Him up from the dead, God hath testified the redemption wherewith he undertook to redeem us from the miseries, into which we were fallen. And among these, how afflicting were the loss of immortality, and of the hopes of heaven! By raising Him up from the dead, God hath exhibited the sceptre of death broken before our eyes, that ‘amidst the changes and chances of this mortal life’ His faithful servants might flee for refuge to the hope set before them. “If we believe,” says the Apostle, “that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him^l.” “Because I live,” said our Redeemer Himself to His sorrowing disciples, “ye shall live also^m.”

And now, brethren, is not the doctrine of our resurrection to immortal life that, which dispels the deepest glooms of our present existence? Is it not this, which gives to virtue her best encouragement, and most fervent zeal? Does it not afford the only consolation under the loss of those, whose lives and whose love were the zest of our felicity? Does it not illumine and cheer the valley, at the entrance of which our nature exerts its most powerful recoil,—

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^l 1 Thess. iv. 14.

^k Acts xvii. 31.

^m John xiii. 19.

the valley of death? Hath it not erased from the tomb the inscription, paralyzing to all the noble properties of our nature, 'Death is an eternal sleep:' and inscribed in its stead the invigorating truth, 'Man here takes the rest, from which he shall awake to eternal day.' If then these choicest of our consolations, these most precious of our hopes, have their certainty from the event we are commemorating, with what fervent joy should we return from the sepulchre, with what holy gratitude should we keep this feast! Mourning widow, have you a husband, who, you hope, when he passed from this life, entered upon the joy of immortality? Weeping parent, have you a child, whose spirit you trust, having been washed in the laver of regeneration, was taken at its death into Abraham's bosom? Dutiful son, have you a mother, whose absence from you you mourn, but concerning whom, it is the solace of your grief to believe that she is among the spirits of the Just, before the throne of the Eternal? Affectionate sister, have you a brother for whom your tears still flow, and would flow without intermission, were it not for the faith which checks them with the assurance, "Thy brother shall rise again?" How great should be your gratitude to your Redeemer, who hath purchased by His death and resurrection for these your friends, the immortality and joys, upon which they have entered for ever and ever!

^a John xi. 23.

SERMON XLVI.

—◆—
ON EASTER-DAY.
—◆—

ACTS iv. 33.

And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

WHAT! the Apostles of Him, whom, in the week past, we have seen abased, crucified, and consigned to the mansions of the dead, do any thing among the Jews “with great power!” Those Apostles, who but lately when their Master was arrested, deserted and denied Him; who, at His death, trembling with fear, and overwhelmed with despair, shrunk away into concealment, say any thing in Judea, concerning the Lord Jesus “with great power!” Surely, something of an extraordinary nature has happened; something great has occurred to give them boldness and success! Great indeed! An event took place, which it becomes us, this morning, with grateful remembrance to review. We will then consider the various senses in which it was “with great power” testified by the Apostles.

The enemies of our blessed Lord had, as they thought, accomplished their desire of His destruction. They had brought Him to the cross. They had pierced His heart with a spear. They had delivered Him to be buried. Recollecting His declaration, that He would rise from the dead the third

day, and determined to have His body to produce after that period should have elapsed, they placed upon the stone of the sepulchre, that seal which it was death to break; and stationed before it a band of the Roman soldiers, who, at the time of the feast, were on duty at Jerusalem. But “why do the heathen so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing^a?” “He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision^b.” No sooner did the morn of the third day begin to dawn, than our Saviour bade death resign his sceptre. Having been subject to it awhile, He now brake it; and leaving the monarch of the tomb stript of his power, in triumphant majesty left his domain. Do you ask, who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre? What obstacle was that to Him who burst the strong fetters of death? Do you ask, where were the guards? Appalled, they fell or fled. Do you ask, who were the spectators of the sublime scene? God, who watched for this triumph of His Son, and the multitude of the heavenly hosts, who had not ceased, since He was there deposited, with wondering expectation to observe the sepulchre. Earlier in the morn He rose, than any of His earthly friends: for when they, whom their superior tenderness and constancy determined to embalm His body, came; early as they came, He was gone. Behold, two of the heavenly host sat at the sepulchre; their countenances like lightning, and their raiment white as snow. Unwilling to burst unexpectedly upon His disciples in person, and overwhelm them with surprise and fear, and choosing that as His incarnation, so also His rising from the dead, should have the attestation of beings from the heavenly world, He had

^a Psalm ii. 1.

^b Ibid. ii. 4.

commissioned these ministering spirits, to honour the amiable women who had followed Him through His Passion, and who, He knew, would presently come to embalm His remains, with the first tidings of His resurrection. Accordingly, the angels addressed to them the most joyful truth that ever entered human ears: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him." They went. They saw. They believed. "And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

This brings us to consider, as was proposed, in what this great power consisted.

In the first place, their testimony was "with great power" by reason of the great number of witnesses. It was not one, nor two, nor a few individuals, who attested the resurrection. Had the story been an imposture, a small number only would have combined for its propagation. But here were more than were necessary for the fabrication of a cheat, and too many to keep it long a secret. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once^d." He was seen of the women, and of the two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus. These could not have been all deceived. Many of them, at first, were criminally incredulous. They, however, saw Him at several times, in different places, under various circumstances. They ate, and drank, and conversed with Him. They heard Him, and they handled Him. They saw in His hands the print of the nails, and

^a Luke xxiv. 5. Matt. xxviii. 6, 7.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 5, 6.

laid their fingers upon the wound in His side: and in demonstration that it was He, “the Son of God with power^e,” He commanded for them, on the sea shore, a miraculous draught of fishes. His appearance among them was not short, nor obscure; but He continued with them coming in, and going out, for the space of “forty days^f,” arranging with them the conduct to be pursued, with regard to His Church, the kingdom which He was now to establish in the world. Will it be said, that His appearance should have been universal? Surely, when God has given sufficient evidence of a truth, which He requires men to believe, He is not obliged to give them more. With regard to the world in general, if none should believe but those who saw, Christ must have dwelt always, and every where, on the earth: and there would have been no opportunity for the superior blessedness of their faith, who, though “they have not seen, have,” nevertheless, on the word of God, “believed^g.” And with regard to the Jews, as they believed not “Moses and the Prophets,” we have no ground of assurance that the vail would have been taken from their hearts, though “one rose from the dead^h.” “Unto witnesses chosen before of Godⁱ,” was Jesus showed alive after His resurrection “by many infallible proofs^k.” Their testimony was powerful, in that there were an host of them, and that it was of the fullest and most explicit kind.

How far they were credible will appear, if we consider, in the second place, that the Apostles’ evidence was “with great power,” by reason of their well known character. They were known to be poor, timid, and friendless; and, therefore, un-

^e Rom. i. 4.

^f Acts i. 3.

^g John xx. 29.

^h Matt. xvi. 31.

ⁱ Acts x. 41.

^k Acts i. 3.

likely to devise, and unable to execute, a scheme for imposing a falsehood of this nature upon the world. They were persons who aspired to no eminence, who slighted all honours and emoluments, and who had neither the pride, the ambition, nor the prospects, by which impostors are animated. Above all, they were proverbial for integrity in principle and conduct. Simplicity, honesty, and rectitude, were the characteristics of the followers of the "Nazarene¹." Such qualities would render any evidence respectable. Such witnesses could not but speak with "power." Hence it was, that their preaching commanded such attention, and obtained such success. Will it be said that their simplicity exposed them to delusion? There were among them Peter, sufficiently acute; and Thomas sufficiently scrupulous. Will it be said that they had been the followers of Christ, and were interested in the success of this story? Alas! in what way could the story advance the interest of any of them, if Jesus was not risen? It would have been much more natural, as well as reasonable, for them, as indeed they did after the crucifixion, to have shrunk from the public view. There was not, in truth, the shadow of any thing in these chosen witnesses, upon which suspicion could fasten his criminating eye. They had every moral quality which could recommend them; and if the character of a witness, can give weight to his testimony, the Apostles of our Lord were, in the highest degree, entitled to be believed.

Once more. Their evidence had all the "great power," which is ever on the side of truth, in that there was among them consistence, boldness, and correspondent behaviour. They were perfectly consistent. Numerous as were the testifiers of the

¹ Matt. ii. 23.

Saviour's resurrection, there were no divisions, no contradictions, no separate interests: and if there were some little variations in their narratives respecting minute matters, these were reconcilable, and tend rather to confirm their accounts, by evidencing that there had been no combination. In the main, as might be expected of men, who were affected with a truth so novel, so solemn, and so simple, they were "of one heart and of one soul^m." They were, moreover, undaunted. Though before, mortified with disappointment and shaking with terror, they shunned even the light, they now were re-animated. They openly and eagerly proclaimed, that He who had been crucified, was risen from the dead. In the face of the High Priest and rulers and scribes, they asserted that God had made Him whom they had killed, "both Lord and Christⁿ." In the temple and in the synagogues, before kings and governors, they testified the fact. The scourge was lifted; but their lips did not quiver. Crosses were shown as prepared for them, and they replied, "The Lord is risen." There was also correspondent behaviour. They took those steps, to which the doctrine of the resurrection naturally led. They exhibited that life, which it necessarily enforced. They were animated with that joy, which it was calculated to inspire. They manifested that anxiety and diligence to maintain and propagate the religion of their Lord, which it could not fail to produce. When commanded to abandon it, they boldly refused, and refused again; and refused under the most aggravated tortures, and most terrifying threats. When driven to the alternative of relinquishing either life, or their testimony to the truth of the resurrection, they did not hesitate which to resign; but sealed

^m Acts iv. 32.

ⁿ Acts ii. 36.

their testimony with their blood; rejoicing, with a humility and devotion which consummated the sincerity of their evidence, “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name^o.” It needed not arguments to show that this was the conduct of men, who were fully convinced of what they maintained. They gave witness of the resurrection with that “great power,” which is attendant only on truth. Their behaviour was such, as it necessarily would be, if they were assured that their Master was risen from the dead; and it was such, as nothing but this assurance, could have instigated and sustained.

Further. The witness which the Apostles gave of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, was “with great power,” in that they brought to their support, the types and statutes, which God had before ordained as shadows of this great thing to come, and the words which He had spoken “by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began^p.” They opened the Scriptures, the oracles of truth, which God had committed unto the Jews, and alleged from them that “it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day^q.” They pointed to the annual expiatory sacrifice, and to the High Priest entering with its blood into the Holy of Holies; and thence inferred that with His own blood Jesus, the High Priest of the human race, having offered Himself upon the cross, should rise and pass into the heavens, there to “appear in the presence of God for us^r.” They, doubtless, after the example of their Master, pointed to Jonah, the mysterious type of Him who preached repentance, not to Nineveh, but to a guilty world: and showed that “as Jonas was three days

^o Acts v. 41.

^p Ibid. iii. 21.

^q Luke xxiv. 46.

^r Heb. ix. 24.

and three nights” locked up “in the whale’s belly,” so was it appointed, that “the Son of Man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth^s.” We hear them saying to their astonished auditors, “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again^t :” and appealing in attestation of this declaration, to words which had long been sacred, and to Seers who had never been disputed. Now we behold St. Paul addressing the Church at Antioch, and summoning Isaiah to confirm his assertion, that, in the resurrection of Jesus, were given unto God’s people “the sure mercies of David^u.” And who, at this distance, perceives not the strength of the reasoning of the great Apostle of the Gentiles? For without the resurrection of Jesus, what mercies promised to David, and to his seed for evermore, are sure? Now we also hear St. Peter bringing David himself, to confirm the testimony of the resurrection of Christ: “Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell,” says the Psalmist, “neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption^v.” “Men and brethren,” says the Apostle, “let me freely speak unto you of the Patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a Prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption^x.” And who, at this distance, perceives not the strength of the reasoning of the great

^s Matt. xii. 40.

^t Acts xiii. 33.

^u Ibid. ver. 34.

^v Acts ii. 27.

^x Ibid. ii. 29—31.

Apostle of the Jews? For certainly “David, after he had served his own generation, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; but He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption^y.” Thus did the Apostles bring “the Law and the Prophets,” to confirm their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; showing, in this manner, that either the Jewish dispensation received its significance and consummation from the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ; or that, as it was about to pass away, it was an absurd and unmeaning letter. What wonder, then, that so many of the devout Jews, became proselytes to Christianity, and that “a great company of the Priests were obedient to the faith^z.” The argument was of wonderful power with those Jews, who in simplicity and godly sincerity had cherished the revelations which the Most High had vouchsafed to them; and it is of astonishing import, of irresistible force to every man, who considers soberly the wonderful, the supernatural, the connected, the singularly significant nature, of the Jewish economy.

But I would observe further, that the testimony which the witnesses of God unto the people gave of the resurrection of His Son, was “with great power,” in that it left His adversaries destitute of any satisfactory, or reasonable replication. Much it behoved the rulers of the Jews, to prove to the people, who were many of them struck with the miracles of Christ, and with the majesty, and awful occurrences of His death, that they had not “crucified the Lord of Glory^a.” In their care to secure the sepulchre, they betrayed their anxiety to do so. And, blessed Lord, could they have produced Thy sacred body, after the third day, with what triumph would it have

^y Acts xiii. 36, 37.

^z Ibid. vi. 7.

^a 1 Cor. ii. 8.

been exhibited? They would have dragged it into the temple. They would have sent tidings of it to every synagogue. They would have brought it in derision unto Pilate. They would have made it a spectacle, till corruption obliged them to mingle it with the dust. And when they could no longer preserve it, they would have written in the tablets of their nation, the memorial of its fate: and beneath the records of its exhibition, they would, with triumphant sarcasm, have inscribed, what Pilate wrote with indifference, but prophetic import, above the cross, “This was the King of the Jews^b!” But no. There was no such refutation of the resurrection. The body of Jesus, much as it concerned the Jews to exhibit it, and so surely as this might have been done, if they had only slain a deceiver, was never produced. But from the watch was purchased a declaration, in which, as in many a false testimony, there was, through the providence of God, involved a disclosure of the falsehood of the testifiers, “His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept^c :” a testimony so absurd, a defence so feeble, that it needs not any investigation; but it forced from one of the Fathers of the Church an apostrophe so simple, yet so forcible, concerning “this saying that is commonly reported among the Jews^d,” that I cannot forbear to introduce it: ‘Ye wicked, corrupt, senseless wretches; either ye were awake, or asleep. If awake, it was your business to secure the body from being stolen away; if asleep, it was impossible you should either know what was done, or who the persons were, that did it.’

Lastly. The testimony of the Apostles was “with great power,” in that it was accompanied with the confirmation and blessing of God, and produced

^b Luke xxiii. 38.

^c Matt. xxviii. 13.

^d Ibid. xxviii. 15.

great and extensive conviction. They were countenanced from on high. Nature could not have nourished the virtues which they exhibited, and would have sunk under fatigues and sufferings which they endured. They were enabled to “do all things through Christ, which strengthened them*.” To the first work of their ministry, it was necessary that they should be endued with miraculous powers. Profane, as well as sacred writers declare, that these powers were furnished. “By the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought^f, and great grace was upon them all^g.” They were anxious, and obliged to communicate the Gospel to the whole human race. Poor, illiterate, friendless, obscure, how could they accomplish this? Yet, behold, within a few weeks, many thousands of the Jews, among whom were many Priests and principal personages, became believers; and before the last of the Apostles had expired, the Gospel was diffused and embraced in most parts of the then known world. The establishment, and rapid progress of a religion, whose Author was crucified, and its propagators twelve of the most despised men; of a religion, so opposed to the strongest propensities of nature, so different from any thing to which man had been accustomed, and so destructive to ancient, venerated, and congenial systems; and this, too, by means so simple, and seemingly inadequate to the object, is of itself a demonstration of the wisdom and power, with which its witnesses unto the people spake. Shall I be told that Paganism has more generally prevailed? Paganism has its hold on the ignorance of men, and its advocates in their vices and infirmities. Shall I be told that Mahometanism has been spread as successfully? We behold the means of Mahomet’s

* Phil. iv. 13.

^f Acts v. 12.^g Ibid. iv. 33.

success, in his sensual paradise, and his sword. But when we look at Christianity, its strongest adversaries were in the human bosom, and it rejected the aid of passion, money, or force. Who then that soberly ponders its success, can doubt that it had, in its earliest ages, irresistible evidence, that it was “with great power” the Apostles gave witness of the resurrection of its Author, and that God, doubtless, did bear them witness, “confirming the word with signs following^h?”

^h Mark xvi. 20.

SERMON XLVII.

ON EASTER-DAY.

I THESSALONIANS IV. 14.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

AND do we not believe it? "Who is this that cometh from" the tomb, "with dyed garments" from the bed of death? "This that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength^a?" Is it not He, whom we lately attended to the crucifixion, and left fast bound with the fetters of death? Is it not the resurrection of Jesus, which, this day, fills our bosoms with unusual joy, and does not the declaration of the event which we have heard, call it up to our remembrance, free from doubt? Yes. If our service, this day, and the service of the whole Christian Church be not all a mockery; if the testimony of witnesses competent in number and character to establish a fact, which fact they attested with their blood, may not be set aside by mere suppositions and sophisms; if we have not seen such a success of imposture, as is contrary to all the past experience of mankind; if all rules of evidence, and all grounds of belief, be not altogether arbitrary, and if the Almighty Governor of the world has not poured down His blessing upon the work of a blas-

^a Is. lxiii. 1.

phemous deceiver, Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross, according to the Scriptures rose from the dead.

In your minds, my brethren, I presume this point is established. You have no need that I go with you to the sepulchre, and show that “He is not there, but is risen^b.” You awoke, this morning, rejoicing in the glorious truth. Now, the inference which the Apostle makes, from the resurrection of Christ, and which renders it, to us, the most interesting event in the annals of time, is the certainty of our own resurrection. “If we believe,” says he, “that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” And again, writing to the Corinthians; “If Christ be preached, that He rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead^c?”

As it is this inference, that gives us such an interest in the event we commemorate, it shall be my present employment to show you, in the first place, the certainty with which it is drawn; and, in the second place, the inestimable value of it.

That our resurrection is the certain consequence of the resurrection of Christ, will be evident, if we first consider it, as an evidence that the Deity accepted His sacrifice of Himself, in our behalf. Death, we know, is “the wages of sin^d.” In no other way can we account for its introduction into the creation of God. Now of the rise of sin in our nature, we have an account in the sacred history of man’s transgression. To atone for this transgression, and take away the doom of perpetual death, to which it had subjected man, was the avowed object, for which our Saviour offered Himself upon the cross. If, there-

^b Luke xxiv. 6.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 12.

^d Rom. vi. 23.

fore, the Eternal Father accepted His propitiation for our sins ; (and what stronger evidence could he give us that He did, than by raising the crucified Victim from the grave ?) our debt to the law is cancelled. The reason for our subjection to eternal death is remitted, and it is impossible that we should be holden of it.

A sense of unworthiness would naturally excite doubts in any mind, unenlightened by revelation about the resurrection of men to immortality. We are, indeed, conscious of faculties which qualify us for a longer and better being than the present, and of an inextinguishable desire to prolong our existence. But a sense of our sinfulness and moral frailty, must also be felt, whenever we study ourselves. Whether the Deity, therefore, who is able to people his universe with beings, as pure and exalted as He pleases, would condescend to exert miraculous power, to recover us to everlasting life after our dissolution, might appear problematical. The consciousness of our moral corruption would, at least, diminish the probability in some minds. We find that, according to the degree of their virtue, was the strength of the heathen's hope of a future existence. But in Christ, "we have an advocate with the Father," "and He is the propitiation for our sins *." We have acquired new worth by our relation to Him. He will feel an everlasting regard for those, whom He hath redeemed with His blood, and will plead His merits with the Father, for their perpetual preservation. And if His expiation of our iniquities has been accepted, we are, doubtless, begotten by His resurrection to a blessed hope of everlasting life. The Father will behold us with peculiar regard, as the fruit of His Son's sufferings, and for His sake, allow the efficacy

* 1 John ii. 1, 2.

of His merits to save us from the dominion of the grave.

Indeed the Prophet foretold, and He himself declared that, in “the travail of His soul,” in the happiness of those whom He rescued from destruction, He should find the reward of His obedience, and “be satisfied.” Now can it be supposed, that in the short lived tenants of this chequered life, our Saviour “saw His seed?” Has He no other satisfaction, than to have redeemed them to the transient and adulterated happiness of this precarious state: or will the Almighty Father suffer him to be defeated in His purpose, or deprived of His reward? No. If He were pleased and satisfied with His propitiation for the sins of the world, for our Redeemer’s sake, as well as ours, them “who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

Now, that He did accept His sacrifice of Himself, His resurrection is the fullest, and most satisfactory evidence, which could be given. In raising Him from the dead, God set His seal to all that Christ had done. In testimony of His approbation, He gave Him this public triumph before angels and men, on His return from the conquest of sin and death. Accordingly the Apostle argues; “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins^h :” implying that, if He were raised, our sins were cancelled, which were the sting, that is, the power of death.

Again. How certainly the doctrine of our resurrection is established by the resurrection of our Lord, will be evident, if we consider it as the sufficient, and august proof of the truth of His religion. That miracles are stupendous evidences of the truth of any doctrine, in evidence of which they are really

^f Isa. liii. 11.

^g Ibid. ver. 10.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 17.

wrought, is incontrovertible. That to raise Himself from the dead is the greatest miracle Christ could have wrought, or man can conceive, no one will deny. When it is added that this miracle fulfilled prophecies which pointed to it, in distant and at different times, it will be confessed, that it combines in itself all the force which any evidence can possibly carry. To this, therefore, Jesus Himself appealed, and when a sign was demanded of Him, rested upon it the credibility of His mission. Without this resurrection of our Lord, the support of His doctrines would, I conceive, have been imperfect; but while this stands, though every other argument should be subverted, the Christian faith would remain unshaken. And blessed be the wisdom and care of our God, He hath so fortified this important pillar, that it defies the enemies of the Gospel, and without being married or enfeebled, has repelled their most vigorous blows. Upon this pillar the religion of the Redeemer stands, the wonder and joy of all considerate beings. For the eternal validity of its doctrines and promises, this is a satisfactory voucher. Now the very end of the Gospel is to bring us to everlasting life and glory. No doctrine is more conspicuous in it, than that of our resurrection to immortality. No promise more frequent than that of eternal felicity to the faithful. We hear it from the mouth of Christ Himself. His Apostles repeat it. It is declared to be the purpose of God in the gift of His Son; and the passages are so numerous, and familiar to you, that I shall not attempt to quote them. This glorious truth, then, as a doctrine of our religion, is confirmed by that event which of itself proves the religion divine. "If Christ be not risen," says the Apostle, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain¹." But

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 14.

by rising He established His word, and this word is eternal life.

But I add once more, that the resurrection of our blessed Lord confirms our expectations of being raised to a future life, by exemplifying the mystery to us. This is what man needs and desires, to place the subject beyond all doubt. He may conjecture, from the imperfection of the present life, and the promiscuous fate of the virtuous and the wicked, a future retribution. He may gather from the properties of his soul, and forebodings of his conscience, a probability, that he is designed for another state of being. What he wishes, he may incline to believe, and religion may kindly descend to confirm his hopes. But in a thing so dear, he is anxious to have the possibility of the thing exemplified by fact. Till some one exhibits death's sceptre actually broken, the grim monster seems to reign the unconquerable monarch of the world. An instance here, would be worth many arguments. And such an instance we have, through the abundant riches of the power and goodness of God. In our own nature, in that body and soul in which He lived and was very man, Christ returned to life, after death had laid his hand on Him, and he had descended into the tomb. In this the Eternal Father demonstrated His power to relume the sleeping dust, re-mand into it the departed spirit, and fit it for an eternal duration. "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him^k." In His resurrection God hath manifested His power, to awake every son of Adam from the sleep of the grave; and the end, for which He hath manifested it, is our assurance that He will do it.

^k Rom. vi. 9.

Such is the evidence, that the certainty of our resurrection is the consequence of the event which we this day commemorate. It remains an interesting duty, to set before you the inestimable value of this lively hope, to which we are begotten of God by the resurrection of His Son. But time will not permit me now to enter upon it¹.

My Christian friends, go we to the altar of our God, and as the fittest expression of our joy, keep the great eucharistic feast. There, in commemoration of our deliverance from the bondage of death, let us celebrate the offering of the true Paschal Lamb. “And thus, shall ye eat it^m;” “having your loins girt about with truthⁿ;”—the shield of faith in your hands;—“and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace^o.” Ye shall eat it with solemnity, and holy joy; for “it is the Lord’s Passover^p.” With faith and obedience apply its blood to your spirits, and have in remembrance your wonderful deliverance from death: and when the chosen Son of God shall appear in judgment upon a rebellious and impenitent world, you shall be saved from the sorrows which will come upon the disobedient; and be taken to that land of perpetual rest and delight, which the Father hath given for you to the “Captain of your salvation^q,” as the reward of His sufferings, victories and triumphs.

¹ It is to be lamented that this division of the subject was left incomplete by the author.

^m Exod. xii. 11.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 14.

^o Ibid. ver. 15.

^p Exod. xii. 11.

^q Heb. ii. 10.

SERMON XLVIII.

—
ON THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.
—

COLOSSIANS ii. 10.

And ye are complete in him.

It is natural to look back upon the wonderful events, some of them sorrowful, and some of them joyful, which we have lately commemorated. Indeed the Church does not yet cease from her special joy on account of the resurrection of her Lord; but still dwells upon it with exultation and delight. As we behold our adorable Master dying for our sins and rising again for our justification, and in these His acts, are reminded of His character, His instructions, and offices; I know not a passage of holy writ more suitable for our contemplation, than this of St. Paul to the Colossians, “Ye are complete in Him.”

Let us first consider, to whom these words are addressed. They are contained in an epistle to the members of an eminent Church, which was gathered by Epaphras at Colosse. These “saints and faithful brethren^a” had embraced with a lively and steady zeal the religion of Christ, and had conformed themselves with distinguished exactness to His institutions and injunctions. It appears, that by baptism they had been regularly incorporated into the Church of

^a Col. i. 2.

their Redeemer ; for the Apostle observes of them, that they were “buried with Him in baptism, wherein also they were risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God ^b.” They were also with exemplary fidelity, lovers and cherishers of the doctrines, sacraments, and discipline of the Church : for, says the zealous Paul to them, “ though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ ^c.” As might be expected of a people, who were thus established in their principles, and regular in their conduct, it appears that these Colossians were renewed in their lives : for the Gospel had “ brought forth its fruit in them ^d,” and though there was room, as among the best men there ever will be, for Apostolic cautions and exhortations, yet it is evident from the epistle, that they had abounded in those distinguishing Christian graces, “ faith, hope, and charity ^e.” To persons of this description, were the words in the text addressed ; and in them, without doubt, to the sincere disciples of our Redeemer, the true members of His Church, in every age, and every place. To all such His ambassadors are authorized to say, “ Ye are complete in Him.”

Let us, in the second place, consider, in what this completeness consists. Were I to attempt to set it before you in all its extent, it would require a volume, rather than a discourse. A volume did I say ? Alas ! and who should write it ? For to a conception of the fulness that is in Christ Jesus, all finite powers are utterly inadequate. It is well styled by an inspired penman, “ the *unsearchable* riches of Christ ^f.” All that we can do, is to contemplate it in some of its obvious, and most interesting particulars.

^b Col. ii. 12.

^c Ibid. ver. 5.

^d Ibid. i. 6.

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

^f Eph. iii. 8.

Knowledge is the foundation of all religion, and all excellency. Without it, there can be no elevated character in man ; no wisdom nor satisfaction in his management of life ; no reasonableness in his service to his Creator ; no basis to his faith, nor certainty in his hopes ; no sunshine of joy upon his soul ; no pleasantness, nor safety in his path. In this fundamental particular we are “ complete in Christ Jesus ; for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ^g.” In Christ are wrapped up all the counsels and purposes of God. In Him are placed the fountains of all truth. From Him proceed all sure instructions ; and there is no rest for the inquiries of the soul, till it is brought humbly to His feet. He is appointed as the Sun of the intellectual firmament. When He appears there is light ; we see our path ; and order and beauty are discernible in every thing around us. Where He shines not, all is confusion and darkness. Ah, were we not familiarized to His shining, with what transports of joy, with what exclamations of gratitude, should we hail His beams !

In this article of knowledge, where else, than under the instructions of Christ, shall we find man “ complete ?” Shall we find him so under the guidance of nature ? Alas ! look at the savage. In many things, how nearly allied to the brute ; and upon the subjects of religion and salvation, how ignorant even of his ignorance and of the importance of truth ! Shall we find him “ complete ” under the light of science and refinement ? Look at the philosopher. How restless ! how perplexed ! how dubious ! At the end of his labours, and height of his attainments, still asking anxiously, “ What is truth ^h ?” The Christian need never look back with envy upon the

^g Col. ii. 3.

^h John xviii. 38.

world, as if pure instruction could be found in any of its resources. It is overspread with ignorance. Men, out of the Church of God, have been every where enveloped with darkness, and a prey to delusions. The highest point of wisdom attained by the wisest of their number, was expressed in the just and humbling adage, ‘ This only do I know, that I know nothing.’ On this account it was, that St. Paul was anxious to guard the Christians at Colosse, by a sense of their completeness in Christ, against being beguiled with the enticing words and flattering opinions of philosophical teachers, by whom they were surrounded. “ Beware,” says he, “ lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him ¹.”

In Christ Jesus resides the fulness of the supreme intelligence. We can have no better, we can need no other instructor. He is the Word and Wisdom of God. All the will, and purposes, and counsels of the Almighty, are committed unto Him. And the renewed mind, which hath been brought into union with Him, and surrendered itself entirely to the guidance of His hand, and instructions of His voice, finds itself translated into regions of pure and Divine truth; which present on all sides innumerable bright, and safe, and delightful paths; and in every part of which is seen the glory, is felt the presence, of the invisible Deity. In these regions, the soul of the diligent can never be destitute of its proper knowledge. What is there, O Christian, of becoming knowledge, relating to thy being, thy business, or thy destiny, which Christ thy Instructor

¹ Col. ii. 8—10.

hath not communicated? What is there, concerning thy God, or the universe, or truth, or holiness, of which it is certain that the knowledge would be beneficial to thee, that thy adorable Master hath not revealed? What is there, concerning the ways of life, of peace, and salvation, which it behoves thee to know, that He who is “the way, the truth, and the life^k,” hath not explained? And how great is thy felicity, how great thy security, in quaffing thy knowledge from streams, whose source is the fount fast by the throne of God; from streams, from which, if thou drinkest purely, thou canst never imbibe any thing that can savour of error, or prove injurious to thy soul’s health; from streams, to the source of which all higher orders of intelligence repair, for the draughts that inspire them with heavenly wisdom, and which are perpetually visited and blessed by the Holy Spirit of God! On the brinks of these streams, who that abides can long be ignorant what is good, or what the Lord his God requireth of him? These instructions, which are set open to us in Christ Jesus, are full and certain; full, in that they are adequate to all our necessities; and certain, in that He is the wisdom of God. Yea, we may go further, and add that they furnish means for our perpetual increase in knowledge, and advancement in goodness. They are unfathomable; they are exhaustless. We may say of the wisdom they contain, as an Apostle hath said of the love that hath made them accessible to us, it “passeth knowledge^l.”

But further; true knowledge will make us acquainted with our own sinfulness, and with the holiness of God, and consequently with our need of a propitiatory sacrifice, wherewith to appear before

^k John xiv. 6.

^l Eph. iii. 19.

our Maker, and the desirableness of a Mediator to intercede with Him in our behalf. Where has not man indicated his sense of the necessity of such a sacrifice, and sought to avail himself of some such mediation? There has been no religion without an altar; and no altar without a priest. In the usages of mankind in every age, we may trace strong evidences of an early promulgation of that principle of the Divine economy, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission^m :” and where is the enlightened bosom, in which may not be found feelings, which resort with joy to the thought of an Intercessor; and reasons, which prove it as fit as it is desirable, that between the Holy God and His offending children, there should be a Mediator? Now in these most important particulars, we are “complete,” in our Redeemer; for He is the all-sufficient sacrifice provided, and accepted by our heavenly Father, even the Son of His love, “in whom we have redemption through His bloodⁿ.” He is the Mediator whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, and of whose mediation He hath testified his acceptance, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. The blood which flowed from the cross, is of efficacy before the throne of the Almighty, proportioned to its value; and its value who shall calculate, what language shall express? All other sacrifices were insignificant, but as they had respect unto this. They were ineffectual. They were shadows of which the substance is Christ. Christians have in Him both a sacrifice and a Priest, of whose prevailing power with the Father there is infallible assurance, in that they are at once the Father’s offspring, and the Father’s appointment.

And where, out of the Church of the Redeemer,

^m Heb. ix. 22.

ⁿ Col. i. 14.

is man “complete” in these respects? Where else shall we find him with a sacrifice for his sins, on whose efficacy he can rely; or with a Mediator with his God, in whose success he can be confident? Shall we find him so among the Gentiles? He is surrounded there with a host of mediators; but behold, “they have eyes, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths^o.” He is offering sacrifice upon a thousand altars; but, lo! they are offered to the Being whose they already were; and what efficacy is there in their blood to take away sin? Shall we find him “complete” in these respects among the Jews? Their whole system was “the ministration of condemnation^p.” Their sacrifices and ordinances were but “a shadow of things to come^q.” And he who was “circumcised,” became “a debtor to do the whole law^r,” and by every transgression incurred a curse^s. It was on this account that St. Paul was anxious to guard the Colossians, by a sense of their completeness in Christ, not only against being beguiled with the opinions of vain philosophy, but also against resorting to heathenish superstitions, or subjecting themselves to Jewish ceremonies: by allurements to which this distinguished Church, and indeed almost all the Churches in the first ages, were assailed and endangered:—a circumstance which you must keep in mind, if you would rightly understand the scope and meaning of many passages in this and most of the epistles, which are in the New Testament. In the chapter from which the text is taken, the Apostle is chiefly anxious to prevent those, to whom he writes, from relying on any thing, as necessary to the ground of their

^o Ps. cxxv. 16, 17.

^p 2 Cor. iii. 9.

^q Col. ii. 17.

^r Gal. v. 3.

^s Ibid. iii. 10.

justification, “ save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified ¹.” They needed nothing out of Him. In Him was all sufficiency. “ For it pleased the Father, that in Him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself ².” Brought by faith unto their Redeemer, and justified freely through His blood, they needed not to burthen themselves with heathenish observances, or Jewish rites. Nothing could add to the sufficiency of Christ’s grace, or be a substitute for it, if it were wanting. “ Ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ ³.”

As the resources of Jews and Greeks furnish not the means of atonement and peace, how great is the Christian’s happiness in having received from his Maker’s bounty the full price of redemption. His beloved Son hath offered “ in His own body on the tree ⁴” a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the world; and with the blood of the sacrifice is passed into the heavens, there “ to appear” for ever “ in the presence of God for us ⁵.” Ye holy and humble men, who are overwhelmed with the contemplation of the majesty and holiness of Jehovah, behold between Him and you a mighty Mediātor, in whom God is reconciled unto you, and for whose sake ye are honourable and precious in His sight. Ye penitent offenders, who are heavily laden with the consciousness of your sins, behold, in the blood of Christ, a fountain set open by the Almighty, in which you may wash and be clean. Washed in this purifying

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

² Col. i. 19, 20.

³ Ibid. ii. 10, 11.

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

⁵ Heb. ix. 24.

stream, “ though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool ^a.” A persecuting Paul, and an inconstant Peter, a sinful Magdalen, and a crucified thief, have found it sufficient to take away the stains of their guilt : and whenever it is resorted to with penitence and faith, the Everlasting Father hath declared that it shall “ cleanse from all sin ^b.” Faithful members of the Church, who with all your faith and perseverance are conscious of the smallness of your attainments ; and when ye contemplate the joys, and honours, and riches of heaven, are ready to ask with exceeding meekness, shall all this glory be given unto us ? Look at your Redeemer ; “ Ye are complete in Him, which is the head.” As members of His body, ye not only have fellowship in His sufferings, but also participation in His resurrection. He is your life. And for His sake, ye are dear unto the Father. “ When He, who is your life, shall appear ^c,” of that glory, with which the head is encompassed, shall all the members of the body share. Be not dismayed then : “ ye are complete in Him.”

This brings us to contemplate our completeness in Christ, as our Head and King. We have very great need of grace from on high to establish our faith, comfort our hearts, and protect and advance us in the ways of holiness ; for of ourselves we are feeble, and prone to evil, and beset with innumerable difficulties and dangers. Our adorable Redeemer hath received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost. In His state of exaltation, He hath received all necessary and excellent “ gifts for men ^d.” He seeth our necessities ; and the grace which is necessary, shall not, we are assured, be wanting to those,

^a Isa. i. 18.

^b 1 John i. 7.

^c Col. iii. 4.

^d Ps. lxxviii. 18.

who are united with Him as their Head. For, “from the Head, all the body by joints and bands hath nourishment ministered, and knit together increaseth with the increase of God^e.” There are adversaries, too, in sin and Satan, with whom the good man must have many bitter conflicts; and a terrible enemy in death before whom the heart is apt to be dismayed. It is the Christian’s happiness to know, that over all these adversaries “his Lord hath triumphed gloriously^f.” What trophies are these, which we behold of His victory? Approach His cross. Behold; having spoiled principalities and powers, He here triumpheth over them; and the hand-writing that was against us, He hath nailed it to the tree^g. Hasten from the cross to the sepulchre. See the bars of the tomb severed, and the sceptre of its awful monarch, lying broken at its mouth. Go forward a few weeks, and lo! tongues, as of fire, resting upon the heads of His disciples, sent down to qualify them for overcoming every foe. Light up the eyes of your faith, and see the gates of heaven opened by Him, and Jesus Himself “sitting on the right hand of God^h.” What can be wanting to the safety and victory of those, who are united unto the Being, whom the Father hath in so many ways acknowledged, and commended unto mankind, as His Son their Redeemer? His “throne is established” for everⁱ. “All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth^k.” The elements of nature, the invisible “power of the air^l,” the hearts and properties of the dwellers upon earth, the events of time, angels and devils, the keys of life, and the gates of hell; are all under His control. They shall all be

^e Col. ii. 19. ^f Exod. xv. 1. ^g Col. ii. 14, 15. ^h Ibid. iii. 1.

ⁱ Ps. xciii. 2.

^k Matt. xxviii. 18.

^l Eph. ii. 2.

bent by His mighty power, to the eventual promotion of the deliverance and glorification of His body, the Church. This is the end of His administration; the subjection of His enemies, and the crowning of the faithful. Whatever troubles may overtake the believer; whatever mysteries may envelope the ways of Heaven; whatever clouds and tempests may be let loose upon the world, from amidst the seeming confusion and darkness, he may hear the voice of his King, "It is I; be not afraid^m." And in the awful hour of the final consummation, when God shall wind up this present course of things, and the Head and King of the Church shall come forth in His glory, as Judge of the world, then, faithful disciples of the Redeemer, shall it be fully demonstrated of you, that "ye are complete in Him."

What now remains, my Christian friends, but that we turn our attention to the great obvious inference from what has been said, the importance and happiness of being one with Christ? Surely the knowledge, the pardon, the safety, the immortality, which result from this union, are such blessings, as no man, to whom they are proposed, can wisely, can innocently forego. Do you ask, how you may secure them unto yourselves? Christ is "the vine, ye are the branchesⁿ." As the branch cannot partake of the strength and fatness of the root, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye of this completeness, "except ye abide in Him^o." Do you ask how you are to abide in Him? "The Church is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all^p." Repent, and be ye by baptism ingrafted into it. Dwell constantly with it. Avail yourselves of the ordinances

^m Matt. xiv. 27.

^o John xv. 4.

ⁿ John xv. 5.

^p Eph. i. 23.

and means, which He hath provided for its instruction and nourishment. Endeavour to adorn it with every good word and work, holding the true 'faith, in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.' Then shall ye be found in Him. Of His fulness shall ye all receive. And "all things, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all shall be yours^a."

^a 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

SERMON XLIX.

—◆—
ON THE ASCENSION.
—◆—

HEBREWS ix. 24.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

AT this season of the year, we are carried back to the period, when our blessed Lord, having accomplished all things for which He came to our earth, blessed His infant Church, and departed from them into heaven. It was a period of joy to the angelic hosts, which met Him on His way, and welcomed His victorious return to the regions of bliss. It was the jubilee of human nature, which then was freed from the shackles which confine it to earth, and passing the portals of the skies, was invested with an eternal residence in the celestial world. There, as our forerunner, and the “ Captain of our salvation^a,” Jesus is seated; clothed with the highest Priestly and Princely dignity by the Father; making unceasingly intercession for us; guiding the events of time by the counsels of the Godhead, to the final and glorious consummation of all things.

That you may have a scriptural knowledge of this mystery of our faith, I have chosen for a guide to

^a Heb. ii. 10.

our present meditations these words of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews: "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true: but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

This passage, and most of the texts of Scripture which allude to the ascension of our Lord, lead us for an explication of it, to the economy of the tabernacle and temple of the Jewish Church. You will remember that in these, according to the directions of God, there was, besides the vestibule and outer court, an interior place, separated by a veil, and called "the most holy place^b." Here was the mercy-seat of the ark of the covenant, between the cherubim, over which the Shechinah, or manifestation of the Divine presence, usually appeared. Into this sacred recess, none was permitted to enter, but the high priest. Once only in the year, on the great day of expiation, when atonement was made for the sins of the whole people, he passed through the veil into the presence chamber of the Deity, to present the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat. The ceremony was this. Having first purified himself with water and blood, the animal which the Most High had chosen to be the expiatory and propitiatory sacrifice, for the sins of the whole nation, was offered by him in the outer court, upon the altar of burnt-offerings. He then took of the blood of the goat, and entered with it into the holy of holies, where, after offering incense, as a token of homage, he sprinkled the blood seven times before the mercy-seat, and made intercession for the people. What now did this ceremony signify, which was instituted by God, and the observance of which was made a condition of their being brought into

^b Exod. xxvi. 33, 34.

the promised land? It was “a shadow of good things to come^c ;” whose substance, whose reality was Christ.

It is remarkable that the Jews, as we learn from Josephus, and the writings of the Hebrew Doctors, considered the outer courts of the tabernacle, as symbolical of the earth, and the holy of holies, as an emblem of heaven. When, therefore, our blessed Lord, at the time appointed by the Father, had by the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross made a full and acceptable expiation “for the sins of the whole world^d,” it became Him, as the great High Priest of mankind ordained by God, and made “perfect through sufferings^e,” to enter into the holy of holies, not made with hands, even “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” Into the purest and most holy place in the universe, “the heaven of heavens^f,” where the hosts of God have their abode, and the Divine Majesty is most specially present, Christ hath ascended in our nature and behalf. There He pleads before the throne of the Almighty the merits of the atonement He has made for our race, offering the incense of His perfect obedience to conciliate for us the Divine favour, and interceding powerfully with His own blood for all those who, ‘with hearty repentance and true faith,’ flee for salvation to the foot of His cross. “Christ,” says the Apostle, “being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us^g.” And “He is able to save them to the

^c Heb. x. 1.

^d 1 John ii. 2.

^e Heb. ii. 10.

^f 1 Kings viii. 27.

^g Heb. ix. 11, 12.

uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them ^b.”

It appears from many accounts, that while the high priest was making intercession in the most holy place, the people were without, confessing their sins, and professing their allegiance to the Almighty. Among the uses which have been assigned to the golden bells, which were ordered to be suspended around the bottom of the pontifical robe, it has been supposed, with much probability, that they were to give notice when the high priest entered within the vail on this solemn business, that the people might behave with correspondent sobriety. Be this as it may, it is certain that the Jews refrained at this season, from every thing which was incongruous with the service performing for them, and engaged chiefly in acts of devotion and mercy. In like manner, while our master is in heaven, we in this earth, this outer court of God's universal tabernacle, have our work to do. There are conditions of the covenant on our part to be fulfilled. Christ hath instructed His Church to live here, in the exercise of faith and repentance, of patience, devotion, and charity, while He is interceding for them with the Everlasting Father. And, methinks, there is a propriety in this, of which no considerate mind can be insensible. For what can be more incongruous, while our Head is pleading with the Almighty the merits of His sufferings in our behalf, and supplicating for our growth in virtue, and reception to glory, than for us to be immersed in the pomps and vanities, the passions and vices of this transitory state; forgetful of our Intercessor, and of the glorious inheritance to which He would exalt us? It is a solecism, which the angels, if they are permitted to be witnesses of our behaviour, must behold with amazement. Surely,

^b Heb. vii. 25.

there should be something of harmony between our lives, and the services which are performing for us in the courts of heaven. It is meet and right that our prayers should be united with the intercessions of our Lord, and our souls and bodies preserved pure for the reception of that Spirit, which His prevailing offices obtain. "Having," therefore, says St. Paul, "an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure waterⁱ."

In this reign of frailty and temptation, we have need of much forbearance and compassion, on the part of God. Our infirmities are great. The shades of our wants and dangers are too varied for the finest pencil to represent them. To be suited to our nature, and inspire us with the fulness of hope, our Advocate must be one, who can enter into our feelings, and know our distresses; who can plead every thing in mitigation of our sins, which the frailty of our condition can furnish, and supplicate every thing for the promotion of our peace, which the difficulties of our situation can require. Now such a Mediator is Jesus Christ. Though He is in heaven, He has dwelt on earth in our nature, and has all that sympathetic interest in our cares, which the most perfectly compassionate disposition, and the fullest experience of our griefs, can unitedly excite. "We have not an High Priest," say the oracles of truth, "we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin^k."

It belonged exclusively to the priests, under the Mosaic dispensation, to bless the people in behalf of God. And, doubtless, on the great day of atone-

ⁱ Heb. x. 21, 22.

^k Heb. iv. 15.

ment, they received joyfully that blessing, which, we may reasonably suppose, the high priest brought from the holy of holies, after he had made expiation for their transgressions. In like manner, our High Priest hath received of the Father all gifts and blessings for His Church. With the voice of His ministers, He dispenses to the penitent assurances of the pardon of their sins. Visibly, with a rushing mighty sound at first; and in a still small voice in the bosom since, the Comforter, His most precious gift, comes down; to send whom "it was expedient that He should go away¹." Mansions in the Father's house are given Him, which He is preparing for the eternal accommodation of His friends. And the blessings which this adorable Priest and King of the redeemed shall bring for them, when He "shall come in like manner as He went into heaven²," are represented to our minds in the Holy Scriptures, by crowns of glory, palms of victory, and white robes of purity and peace.

It is impossible for us, in this confined state, to form any adequate conception of the blessings, which are in reserve for the faithful. But it was as our representative, that Christ ascended into heaven in our nature, and our eternal life is there secured with Him, claimed by Him, as the fruit of His sufferings, at the throne of God. When the daily sacrifice and oblation was to cease, in consequence of the offering of Christ once for all, the vail of the temple, which separated the holy of holies from the outer courts, "was rent in twain from the top to the bottom³;" signifying, that there should be no more occasion for an earthly high priest, but that the kingdom of heaven was opened to all believers, through the great Intercessor. And when our Lord shall have accom-

¹ John xvi. 7.

² Acts i. 11.

³ Matt. xxvii. 51.

plished His mediatorial office, the type shall receive its complete fulfilment. The vail which now separates heaven, the holy place of the Most High, from this outer court, our earthly abode, shall at the grand consummation suddenly pass away. The ransomed of the Lord shall ascend with Him, into the dwelling place of the Almighty; their pardon shall be proclaimed, and their immortality confirmed: and Jesus Himself, having finished His office, shall become subject to the Father, "that God may be all in all."

Thus, I have imperfectly illustrated this important mystery of our holy religion, the ascension of our blessed Lord: a mystery, resting upon the strong and stupendous pillars of prophecy and type; established by the testimony of those, who were eye witnesses and martyrs to the reality of the fact; and placed beyond the reach of reasonable doubt, by His bestowing those supernatural gifts, which He had promised to His Apostles, as evidences and fruits of His glorification. But why do I speak of the evidences of this part of revelation? You are already persuaded of its truth. Your belief in it you do every Sabbath declare, before the presence of God, in the solemn repetition of the articles of your faith. Let me rather entreat you, Christians, this day, to make a solemn pause; and implant in your hearts a just consideration of the ascension of Christ, and of its important consequences. Is it, indeed, true, that having cancelled our sins upon the cross, and broken for us the massy sceptre of death, He hath thrown open the gates of heaven, and entered as our harbinger? Who, among the heathen, hath named such a thing? Where, in the gloomy region of scepticism, shall we find such joyous prospects? Let us, then, hold fast the profession of our faith; and love and

adore its Author. Is it, indeed, true, that the Son of God is our “advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins^p?” How ravishing the reflection! What holy confidence should it give us, when we make our prayers! What zeal, and faith, and delight, when we offer unto God the memorial of His death, in the eucharist! What comfort ineffable, when our souls are cast down under a sense of our infirmities, and our spirits are disquieted within us! Is it, indeed, true, that man, “made lower than the angels,” is in the person of Immanuel advanced to the right hand of God, and “crowned with glory and honour^q?” With what self-respect should the thought inspire us! Shall habits of vice debase; shall carnal affections dishonour; shall even an impure thought defile, a nature which has place in the courts of the Most High, and is so nearly related to the Father, and to His Son Jesus Christ? Is it, indeed, true, that a time is approaching, when in the dread majesty of Justice the ascended Lord shall return, summon from their graves the slumbering dead of every place and generation; and, while He takes the righteous to Himself and to all the bliss of the Father’s house, will leave the ungodly to themselves and to all the miseries of condemnation? What heart can lie still at the thought? What mind is not made sober, by the reflection? Who sees not, that it is his interest, as well as duty, to conform his life to the lovely example of his Saviour, and to set his “affections on things above^r?”

My brethren, these are views of the ascension of our Lord, which you must admit as just and reasonable, unless you abandon your faith. Strange, that they have not a more powerful influence on our lives! It is true, when “the spirit is willing, the

^p 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^q Heb. ii. 9.


^r Col. iii. 2.

flesh is" often "weak". Frailty is our inheritance, and our life is beset with temptations and sorrows. But for our encouragement let us remember, that the Almighty Father is compassionate and good. Let our sense of His goodness move our ingenuousness, and rouse us to circumspection. "Laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God".


* Matt. xxvi. 41.

† Heb. xii. 1, 2.

SERMON L.



ON THE ASCENSION.



T HEBREWS ii. 9.

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.

THE last grand display of our Saviour's life, and the illustrious consummation of His ministry, was His ascension into heaven. This mighty event, we have in the week past been joyfully commemorating, and the Church yet follows with the eye of faith her ascending Lord, wrapt in admiration, and exclaiming, "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof^a."

It is to this great event, as the fruit of our Saviour's incarnation and crucifixion, that the Apostle alludes in the text. The words are peculiarly proper for our present contemplation, as they will naturally lead us to consider, the great honour and advancement of our nature in the glorification of Christ, and the consequences and obligations, which we should infer from this important doctrine of the Gospel. Yes, my friends; in the glorification of your Redeemer, man was exalted to the highest abode of glory and felicity. In the ascent from the greatly favoured

^a 2 Kings ii. 12.

Olivet, there went One, who wore our nature, and, sin excepted, had led our life. This His disciples must have apprehended of the Person, of whose ascension they were taken to be witnesses. It was their well known Master, whom they not long before had seen and handled, and who was talking with them as a man, when He was parted from them.

That Jesus Christ, after having expired for our sins upon the cross, and been raised from the dead, did after passing forty days on earth in arranging the economy of His Church, ascend into heaven, all Christians believe. But when we give our Amen to this article of our faith, have we definite ideas of the truth, to which we assent? Who is it that, “for the suffering of death, is crowned with glory and honour^b?” When He says to His disciples before his departure, “I go to prepare a place for you^c,” who is it that goes? Undoubtedly, the Being in whom existed the wonderful union of the human, and the Divine natures. It was not solely the Divinity of the Son returning to its pristine abode. That was never “made lower than the angels.” That being incapable of passion, never tasted “the suffering of death^d.” That was not limited by His visible presence, but while it dwelt in Him upon earth, was at the same time, “above all, and through all, and in all^e.”

Of the place and state, to which our Redeemer is exalted, we can form no adequate conceptions. The Divine Spirit has used such figures and descriptions, in the record of the event, as give the loftiest ideas of glory, bliss, and power, which our minds can embrace. To the right hand of the throne of God, the place of highest distinction and most honourable

^b Heb. ii. 9.

^d Ibid.

^c John xiv. 2.

^e Eph. iv. 6.

pre-eminence ; into heaven, the peculiar abode of the Divine presence, and seat of purest and immortal joys ; to the Father's house, all whose inhabitants have the Father's appropriate affection, and in which are the treasures of wisdom and happiness, open and enjoyed for evermore :—is Immanuel gone. But to follow Him, and fully estimate His glorification, we are unable. Our mortal faculties could not sustain its splendour. A cloud receives Him out of our sight. Of this, however, we are assured, and it is the utmost outline of exaltation which we can conceive, that our nature has been taken by Him, who graciously espoused it in the day of its poverty and distress, to all “ the glory ” which the best beloved of the Father had with Him, “ before the world was^f.”

Here let us pause, and reflect ; what glory to the fallen nature of man, that the Eternal Son should assume it, even to dwell in it on earth, and say of its humble offspring, “ My brethren are these^g ! ” How immeasurably great, then, its honour and advancement, when He is exalted in it to the right hand of the Father ; “ angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him^h ! ” Where are now, the pitiful objections to the humiliation of the manger, and severity of the cross ? Where is now the despised Nazarene, the scorned teacher of strange doctrines, the unresisting victim of malice and death ? The ascension of Christ vindicates, perfects, crowns the Christian scheme ; it is the top stone which gives firmness and grandeur to the fabric, and displays the proportionate beauty of all its parts. The railings at the incarnation, and objections to the crucifixion, vanish ; all is consistent, grand, and worthy of the author. God is just, and humanity made happy, while we see Jesus, “ who was made a little lower

^f John xvii. 5.

^g Luke viii. 21.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 22.

than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.”

While we perceive, that it was in our nature our Saviour passed into His glory, our advancement hereby will be more impressive, if we consider that, in entering upon His joy, He ‘ opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.’ As the Intercessor of man, to whom the Father hath refused nothing, He went to plead for the justification of His followers to eternal life, that they may be with Him, and partake of His glory. As the “ Captain of our salvation^l,” He in His person took possession of the country which His triumphant victories had secured, entering, as our forerunner, upon the realms of light. As the head of His Church, it was meet that He should be first exalted to the kingdom, prepared for the children of the Father from the beginning of the world, and of necessity, as the head and body are one, so the life of all His members is hid with Him in God. “ In My Father’s house,” says He, “ are many mansions.—I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also^k.” What surer pledge of our inheritance in heaven can we have, than the exaltation of Him, in our nature, to the possession of “ all power in heaven, and in earth^l,” who hath sought our happiness by the sacrifice of Himself, and declared it to be His will, “ that they whom the Father hath given Him, should be with Him where He is^m?”

But of this interesting and stupendous event of the Ascension, where are the evidences? How shall we believe, that this great thing hath been done for us; this thing so wonderful and of such amazing conse-

^l Heb. ii. 10.

^l Matt. xxviii. 18.

^k John xiv. 2, 3.

^m John xvii. 24.

quences? Behold, I bring to you the types, which, "at sundry times, and in divers manners," God vouchsafed to give of what He would accomplish, in the great Redeemer. See Enoch translated to heaven under the patriarchal dispensation, and Elijah under the Mosaic; that men might be assured of another sphere of existence, to which the faithful would be taken by the great Deliverer. See the leaders of Israel, after the sojourning of the people in the wilderness, conducting them through the flood of Jordan to the Canaan of rest and felicity. See the high priest passing through the veil into the holy of holies, after having made the great expiation, with the blood of the sacrifice, there to appear in the presence of God, in behalf of the people. Look at these types, and others which attend them. They are ancient, they are consistent. Ponder, attentively, the testimony they give. You shall find that they owe their existence, their significance, their holiness, to that scheme of grace of which the ascension of the Messiah was an essential part. You shall discover, that they were oracles set in the darker periods of the world, to testify to the sincere inquirer the truth of this mystery, and establish his faith in its interesting consequences. Yes. These holy types are witnesses of the ascension; witnesses, celebrating it in all ages of the world; with a testimony the more impressive, because evidently inspired.

Again. I bring to you that venerable evidence, which the Almighty hath so often employed in the service of truth, Prophecy. Her He admitted to a vision of all things concerning His Christ: and of the ascension she has testified, with unequivocal fulness, and irresistible force. Hear her, in the memorable testimony, given in Babylon: "I saw in the night

^a Heb. i. 1.

visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed^o." How explicit, how powerful is this testimony! The Person appearing, "one like the Son of man;" the situation in which He was seen, in "the clouds of heaven;" the character of Him to whom He came, "the Ancient of days;" and the consequence of His going to "the Ancient of days," the reception of glory, and dominion, and a kingdom; this full and particular testimony by such a witness as Prophecy, when it is applied, carries with it a force solemn and irresistible. It is not her only declaration. She often has proclaimed the same thing. Go back to a more distant time. Hear her, in the prospect of Messiah's approach to His high abode, calling, in sublime apostrophe: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in^p!" Hear her, in contemplation of Him, as entered into heaven, offering her fervent adoration: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men^q." What is this, but Prophecy on one side of the event, as History on the other; giving evidence to times past, present, and future, of the ascension of men's Saviour into heaven?

This brings me to observe, that we have the historical evidence of those, who were eye witnesses of the fact. We have, in several books, written by different persons not long after the event, the testi-

^o Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^p Psalm xxiv. 7.

^q Psalm lxviii. 18.

monies of those, who had the peculiar felicity of beholding the Lord, when he departed from the world to his Father. These were not a few men; they were the whole company of the Apostles; these were men worthy of all credit, for they were eminently honest, consistent, scrupulous, explicit, and unvarying. These were men who had no power, and could have had no motive to deceive others, by framing a falsehood of so singular a nature. They were simple, unambitious, timid; without the influence of wealth, or learning, or friends. If they believed their Master had failed them at His death, they could have no inducement to abide by His cause; and if they believed that He was, indeed, the Son of the Highest, they could not have supposed His cause needed the aid of fiction. These were witnesses who in this matter, could hardly have been deceived themselves. They were on the mount in open day. He had taught them that He should go into heaven. Could they doubt when they talked with Him, when He laid His hands on them, and blessed them; when they stood together, after having walked to the mount, that it was He Himself, Jesus, who had been crucified? Could they have suffered delusion when, while he talked with them, they saw Him parted from them, and, with adoring wonder, beheld Him ascend through the air, till the clouds of heaven “received Him out of their sight?” Could the eyes and the ears of them all have been deceived, when they saw and heard the angels of God, who were kindly sent to confirm to them the reality of what they beheld? They were not credulous; it was neither a situation, nor a time, in which they would easily be deceived. The circumstances of the ascension were such, as free our

^r Acts i. 9.

Redeemer from the least suspicion of imposture: These, moreover, were witnesses, who made such sacrifices, as no human beings, with so little inducement, ever made to deceive others: they made these sacrifices with a calmness, resolution, and perseverance which no men ever exhibited, who were not fully convinced they were not deceived themselves. They encountered scorn, and toil, and persecution. They relinquished houses and lands, professions and prospects, kinsfolk and friends. They endured scourgings, and imprisonments, and tortures, and threatenings, at the recital of which our spirits are appalled; yet they endured them with unshaken fortitude, and often with joy, rather than alter their testimony. They laid down their lives for their testimony; sooner than recall what they had testified, yea, sooner than remain silent, they submitted to death; to the most terrible deaths: with steady and holy joy, sealing, whenever it was necessary, their declaration with their blood. Could the witnesses, and historians of our Lord's ascension, have been deceived? Could they, at such a price, without any countervailing benefit whatever, have imposed an idle fable on the world? In men, who had seen the Master that blessed them, taken up into heaven, we might, perhaps, expect a devotion like this. But sure, the Apostles needed, to produce in them such faith and perseverance, and to sustain them under such labours and sufferings, all the conviction of their Lord's power and glory, which an actual vision of His ascension into heaven could give them.

Our first emotion, upon contemplating the ascension of our Lord, is amazement. The lustre of His virtue in life, and His sublime equanimity in death, transport us with the perfectibility of our nature. We stand by His tomb, and behold Him trample upon its grisly prince, with exulting astonishment.

But when from Mount Olivet, we see Him rise from earth, with the eye of faith we follow Him to “the right hand of the Majesty on high^s,” anticipating the period, when all His redeemed shall share His glory, and the human nature be enveloped in the perfections and felicities of the Divine:—the mind faints under the greatness of its object. Devout amazement seizes every thought; and, like the eleven, “we stand gazing up into heaven^t.”

But, from amazement at this precious part of the Christian dispensation, let us rouse ourselves to consider our obligations to respect a nature, which God has so highly exalted, and destined for such noble felicity. Nothing is more difficult, than to think rightly of ourselves; to temper the contempt and abhorrence, which the frailty and depravity of our nature should excite, with the self-respect, which beings should preserve, who have “fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Considered without the light, the doctrines, and the prospects of the Gospel, man is an ignoble, unhappy being. Every considerate person, who will view himself faithfully, as he is by nature, shall find abundant reasons to wrap his mind in the garment of humility, and in meek penitence bewail his fall. But, considered in the view in which the Gospel places him, man rises from his ruins. The Christian is allied to noble beings; his prospects are great; and it is scarcely to be decided, whether he is more to be pitied, as he is by nature, or revered, as he is by grace. This mixture of strange extremes in our condition, is so emphatically expressed by the poetic divine, that I cannot repress my inclination to adduce his pleasing authority :

^s Heb. i. 3.

^t Acts i. 11.

^u 1 John i. 3.

‘ How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,
 How complicate, how wonderful, is man !
 Distinguish’d link in being’s endless chain !
 A beam ethereal, sully’d and absorpt !
 Tho’ sully’d and dishonour’d, still divine !
 Dim miniature of greatness absolute !
 An heir of glory ! a frail child of dust !
 Helpless immortal ! insect infinite !
 A worm ! a god !
 An angel’s arm can’t snatch him from the grave ;
 Legions of angels can’t confine him there !’

‘ Reverence yourself,’ was a precept of one of the wisest of the heathen sages. How much more suited to the Christian, who perceives his nature recovered in the person of his Lord, and justly expects to be like Him, when he shall “ see Him as He is^x.” Are we members of a body, of which the Son of God is the head, and shall we not fear to pollute so illustrious a fellowship? Have we a Representative in the inmost presence chamber of heaven, and shall we sink into a mean commerce with vice, or debase, by folly and wickedness, the nature He has exalted? Do we expect to be, hereafter, raised to the right hand of our Master? and shall we defile ourselves with evil, let ourselves down to the follies of His foes, and, with our noble prospects, here wallow in the dust? Forbid it every dignified sentiment in our bosoms! Verily, “ every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure^y.”

We may further observe, from the subject we have been contemplating, the wisdom and propriety of raising our affections, and directing our pursuits, to the great realities of the future existence. If He, in whom we believe, is gone into heaven, and those who “ inherit the promises^z” shall follow Him, there we

^x 1 John iii. 2.

^y Ibid. ver. 3.

^z Heb. vi. 12.

must look for our rest for ever. Our best interests, our eternal abode, our life, are there. We are here, but passengers of an hour, "strangers and pilgrims, desiring a better country^a." Of course, to loiter amid the vain delights of this transient state, is to forget our business and our home.

That "we have here no continuing city^b," we know. Time is hurrying us unceasingly to leave this earth; yea, earth itself is fast hastening to be dissolved, and the element of our abode to pass away. How delightful the reflection, that in the ark our Redeemer hath prepared, our nature shall survive the general wreck! Amid the havoc of death, and the solemn awe which the approach of judgment inspires, how solacing the thought, that the faithful "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness^c!" But if we do, indeed, believe, that our hopes, our conversation, our treasures, are in heaven, will not our hearts be there also? Shall we be absorbed in the pleasures, the vanities, and the vices of this world, which every thing reminds us we must leave, while our Head, our Master, is calling us to His glory, and we have this momentous calling to secure? Shall we, in the outset of our voyage, encumber ourselves with burthens, which we must relinquish, when we have scarcely got under weigh, while we neglect the habits, the affections, and the graces, for which we shall have need in our eternal and exalted existence? "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God^d."

Let us then be induced by what has been said, rightly to conceive, and faithfully to improve, that

^a Heb. xi 13, 16.

^b Ibid. xiii. 14.

^c 2 Pet. iii. 13.

^d Col. iii. 1.

sublime and most gratifying part of our faith, the ascension of our Master into heaven. Let it establish our confidence in the Gospel, rejoice our hopes, and lead us to fit ourselves for an entrance “into the joy of our Lord^e.” Though He is taken from our view, He is mindful of our conduct; and “shall so come,” for the consummation of His work, “as we have seen Him go into heaven^f.” While deprived of His presence, are we anxious that His Spirit may rest upon us, to guide and support us on our difficult way? Let us take up the mantle He has left, in His word, and His sacraments, and seek, on every emergency, “the Lord God of Elijah^g.” So shall we be of the number, for whom “it was expedient that He should go away^h.” Our journey of life shall be conducted to our satisfaction. And when we are brought, at length, to the waters of that Jordan, which lies between us and the abode of the Prophets, we shall be able in the power of the Spirit of our Master, to smite, and pass dry shod, between its divided waves.

^e Matt. xxv. 21.

^g 2 Kings ii. 14.

^f Acts i. 11.

^h John xvi. 7.

SERMON LI.



ON WHITSUNDAY.



ST. JOHN iv. 14.

But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

To obtain the true meaning of our Lord in this animated passage, we will recur to a similar declaration, made by Him on another occasion. Standing amidst the assembled Jews, on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, when water from the pool of Siloam was poured out, as a drink offering unto the Lord, Jesus cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water^a.” Upon the record of this declaration, there follows an inspired exposition: “This spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive^b.” The passage is so evidently parallel with my text, that the comment upon one may be considered as a comment upon the other: and we may learn from it, that by the water, which Christ mentioned to the woman of Samaria, we are to understand the grace of the Comforter or Holy Spirit; of which He was the great distributor

^a John vii. 37, 38.

^b Ibid. ver. 39.

appointed by the Father, having purchased it by His mediation for the children of men. Accordingly we find, that when the woman had expressed her surprise that He, "being a Jew," should ask of her a Samaritan, a draught of the water which she had come to Jacob's well to draw, He replied, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water^c." As if He had said, Hadst thou known the riches of that grace, which God will pour out upon those who seek it; and that I, who speak unto thee, am the Messiah, to whom the distribution of this inestimable gift is committed, thou wouldest have asked, and I would have given thee, truths and influences of the Holy Spirit, which would be in thee, as a well of water, perpetually springing up, and refreshing thy soul, allaying thy thirst for ever, and nourishing thee unto eternal life.

In an age, when finite reason and human philosophy, are made the standards of truth; when many Christians content themselves with a cursory acquaintance with the precepts of the Gospel, and even some of those who are set as angels of the Gospel pool, "forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water^d:" the dispensation of the Spirit, with the doctrine of its operation on the heart, and importance to salvation, is not a very popular theme of discourse, nor, it is feared, a subject of very frequent contemplation. Yet, it is an essential, peculiar, and most comfortable part of the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints^e:" and, happily for us, we are annually brought by the excellent economy of our Church, to acknowledge and con-

^c John iv. 9, 10.

^d Jer. ii. 13.

^e Jude 3.

sider it, in the solemnities of the Whitsuntide feast. To-day, we commemorate the fulfilment of our Redeemer's promise, before His Ascension, in the actual and visible descent of the Comforter upon His assembled disciples; with which is connected the interesting doctrine of our participation with them of the heavenly gift, though in a mode that is dissimilar, and for purposes not precisely the same. With your indulgence, my brethren, I will improve the opportunity to bring to your consideration, in the first place, the reality, and necessity of the gift of the Spirit to all true believers, in every age; secondly, to call your attention to the inestimable value, and important uses of it; and, in the third place, to point to you the channels, through which this gift, this "living water," ordinarily flows. Topics these, which may suggest reflections, that will be pertinent to the joy of this season; and not unprofitable, in the cause of righteousness, if Thou, O Holy Ghost, vouchsafe to descend to consecrate our labours, and, by Thy quickening influences, to fertilize our souls!

That the *extraordinary* manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and the *supernatural* powers, which accompanied it, are continued in the Christian world, is what no considerate person, at the present day, will advance. For the visible descent, and miraculous operations of the Comforter, on the day of Pentecost, there were reasons which belonged to the time, and the events of it; reasons, peculiar to that age, which no longer exist. And the "sound as of a rushing mighty wind," and the "cloven tongues, like as of fire^f," have subsided into an invisible influence of the Spirit upon the hearts and lives of men. So, once, it was expedient that the

^f Acts ii. 2, 3.

Almighty should descend with tremendous majesty of clouds and fire, wind and thunder, and the shaking of Sinai to its base. But, afterwards, when the Prophet waited for His instructions, “the Lord was not in the wind,” nor in “the earthquake,” nor “in the fire,” but in “a still small voice.”

From the change of mode, which we acknowledge, we are not to infer the absence of the substance. That the holy fire, which sat visibly upon the Apostles, is extinguished; that the Comforter, who descended on the day of Pentecost, has returned to the Father; that Christians are not all partakers of the heavenly gift, is contrary to reason, to the declarations of Scripture, and to actual observation. From each of these sources may be deduced the certainty of His invisible abode with all true believers, and the reality and necessity, of His operation in their hearts.

Man is now, what he ever has been since the Fall, a feeble being; ignorant by nature of his God, and duty; living daily in trespasses and sins. While he remains unenlightened by the communication from on high, darkness encompasses his mind. When this darkness is dispersed, and the points of true excellence are clearly revealed, to raise himself to them by his own strength, is not in his power. It is with anguish and humiliation that, in proof of this, I point you to the heathen sage; perceiving, admiring, celebrating the virtues, which in the practice of life he abandons. It is with fear and trembling, that, for the same purpose, I point you to the arduous struggles, and the many defeats, by which the Christian, in endeavouring to maintain his heavenly course, is taught his dependence upon some superior strength. Man's moral powers are so

weakened by corruption ; his affections are so prone to evil ; the holds which temptation has in him, are so numerous and so deep ; his spiritual life is so far gone, that in sacred language he is represented, with awful emphasis, as dead, while he liveth^b. And as soon may he raise himself from the iron slumbers of the tomb, to the life and glories of immortality, as rise by his own strength from the moral decay and corruption of his nature, to the purity, spirituality and holiness, of the new and eternal life. Do you doubt that this is the decision of reason ? Hear her testimony by the mouths of some of her most enlightened votaries. Hear the thoughtful Pythagoras instructing men to pray to the gods for assistance, that they may do what becomes them. Hear the accomplished Cicero confessing, that no man was ever excellent without some divine afflation. Hear the judicious Hierocles teaching the necessity of the divine blessing upon our endeavours after virtue, to make them successful. Hear the virtuous Seneca declaring, that no man is good, without the help of God. The insufficiency of man, of himself, to recover himself to a state of holiness, is no new discovery. It is what the Gentile and Jewish Patriarchs felt. It is what the Christian Apostles bewailed. And it is what every person may find in his own case, when he compares his life with the requisitions of the Divine law, and studies the character and progress of his virtues. But, that we must rise from this state of sin to righteousness, and be renewed in our minds “after the image of Him that created usⁱ,” before we can enjoy the presence and kingdom of God, is evident in the nature of the thing, and is the settled principle of every Chris-

^b 1 Tim. v. 6. St. James ii. 26. 1 St. John iii. 14.

ⁱ Col. iii. 10.

tian's mind. Reason, therefore, concludes, that unless our heavenly Father has abandoned His children to vice and perdition, He will provide the means of sanctifying their nature, for all those, whom He purposes to bring into His heavenly kingdom. And when we are once informed that this office belongs to the Holy Ghost, we cannot doubt that every individual of our frail race, who seeks sincerely the mercies of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life, is a partaker, in such time and measure as God sees fit, of the blessed Comforter's protection and aid. If any are good, truly and uniformly good, it is through the assistance of the Divinity, that stirs within them.

But from the deductions of reason, we pass to the declarations of Scripture, for additional and surer evidences of this great and most comfortable doctrine. It may be considered as implied in many of the prophecies relating to the Messiah's kingdom. Joel proclaims, that, in the latter days, God would "pour out His Spirit upon all flesh^k." Isaiah, having the fountain which Jesus would open, in view, breaks forth in a strain of prophetic invitation: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters^l." David, contemplating at a distance the pouring out of God's grace upon his people, exclaims: "Thou, O God, sentest a gracious rain upon Thine inheritance: and refreshedst it when it was weary. Thy congregation shall dwell therein; for Thou, O God, hast of Thy goodness prepared for the poor^m." Indeed, as the gifts and graces of the Spirit are fruits of the Messiah's mediation and achievements, they must be reckoned among the blessings with which, in Him, "all the families of the earth should be blessedⁿ."

^k Joel ii. 28.

^l Isaiah lv. 1.

^m Psalm lxxviii. 9, 10.

ⁿ Gen. xxviii. 14.

But in the New Testament these coruscations of prophecy are collected and embodied, and shine forth upon us with an enlivening brightness. He who hath the command both of “the upper and the nether springs^o,” while He has taught us the need we have of the Spirit, has graciously given the promise of it to His followers in every age. In the passage already quoted, as parallel with the text, He declares, that, through the bosom of every one that believeth on Him, “shall flow rivers of living water^p.” Here is no limitation to any age; no restriction to any place. For all who confess and follow their Redeemer, the immortalizing fountain flows. To the reprehensible Samaritan, if she earnestly ask it, shall the “living water” be given; and the devout Ethiopian, “if he believe with all his heart,” shall be refreshed by the stream, and go “on his way rejoicing^q.” The very promise of the Comforter made by Christ to His disciples, seems hardly capable of fulfilment in the plain acceptance of it, unless those, to whom it was made, be considered as representatives of His whole Church: for it is promised, as a substitute for His own gracious presence, which His Church must always need; and it is promised to abide with them for ever. Nothing, indeed, can be clearer, fuller, or more impressive, than the declarations of Scripture, concerning the perpetuity and importance of the influences of the Holy Spirit. Without it, we are said to be nothing. All men are represented as dependent on it, for faith and sanctification. It is spoken of as the source of the life and growth of every Christian excellence. It is extolled, as the earnest to the faithful, of everlasting life. “Hereby,” says St. John, “know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He

^o Josh. xv. 19.

^p John vii. 38.

^q Acts viii. 37, 39.

hath given us of His Spirit^r.” “Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified,” says St. Paul, “by the Spirit of our God^s.” And again; “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you^t?” And again; “We have all been made to drink into one Spirit^u.” In short, what can more strongly testify the necessity of this grace, than the declaration of our Lord, that “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God^v?” And what can more satisfactorily assure us of the readiness of the Spirit, to come unto all the followers of the Redeemer, than that memorable passage, with which St. Peter closed the first, and best Whitsunday sermon, that has ever been delivered, “The promise is, unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call^y?”

Of similar import, are the institutions which the Scriptures have hallowed. Ordinances are of little value, but as means of grace. These means are ordained to be of perpetual use; and they are of universal extension. Of the typical stream, which God caused to flow miraculously from the rock, which of His people, while journeying through the wilderness of their probation, was not permitted to drink? And unto the ordinances, in which the antitype, the spiritual stream, now flows and follows His Church, which of our race, while journeying through this world of their trial, is not bidden to repair, and take of the “water of life freely^z?” The appointment of the means for the use of all, shows, that all need, and that all may obtain, the influences of the Spirit of God.

^r 1 John iv. 13. ^s 1 Cor. vi. 11. ^t Ibid. iii. 16. ^u Ibid. xii. 13.

^x John iii. 5.

^y Acts ii. 39.

^z Rev. xxii. 17.

Confirming the deductions of reason, and illustrating the declarations of Scripture, there remains the evidence which is drawn from actual observation. And here shall I take you to ‘the noble army of martyrs;’ and show you them stretched upon racks, standing in flames, and walking through furnaces, with a calmness, a patience, a firmness, a joy, which it would seem impossible they should have possessed, if there had not been with them One, like the Spirit of the Son of God? Shall I go further, and take you to ‘the goodly fellowship of the Prophets,’ and show you them, long before the visible descent of the Comforter, wrapt in the visions of the Almighty; fortified to the noblest undertakings; consoled under the heaviest trials; raised to the sublimest virtues; and, like the children of Israel in the land of Egypt, while darkness rested upon all around them, having “light in all their dwellings^a?” No. I will not take you to those; lest you should say, though the one be prior, and the other subsequent to the visible effusion of the Spirit, these were extraordinary endowments, fitted to the necessities of the subjects of them, by the faithfulness of God. I will take you, then, to the infidel; and by the absence of grace from his heart, will show you the necessity of it for all men. Whence his unbelief? He has not used the means of obtaining the gift of God. He has not prepared his heart, nor bowed his knee, to pray unto the Most High. He has not heard meekly the word of truth, nor studied it with docility and affection. He has not performed the vows, which were made for him at his baptism: and all the institutions of Religion he hath presumptuously disregarded. Refusing to use the means,

^a Exod. x. 23.

he hath not had the protection and blessing of grace. In his exposed situation, unbelief hath seized on him. With infatuating impetuosity, she is hurrying him through her dark, and bewildered paths; and ah! she will dash him into the abyss of perdition! Is it, that Religion hath not wherewith to commend herself? Oh, no. This wretched being hath not sought, yea, he hath resisted, yea, he hath despised, the guidance of the Spirit of God. And lo, grace, which comes to all, comes not to him. With such the Almighty will “not always strive^b ;” for He is “a jealous God^c.” He hath left him to himself a monument of our danger and wretchedness, when His Spirit is departed from us. From him, let me take you to the youths, whose spirit the world hath not yet wholly polluted, and to whom the “truth, as it is in Jesus^d,” is happily preached. In them the Spirit operates. In the cool of the day, when passion is still, His voice may be heard in the hearts of every one of them. He whispers to their consciences the importance of salvation; He places before them the loveliness of virtue, and endeavours to kindle their desires; He checks, gently, the deviations of their minds. Do they disregard Him, and prefer the powers of this world, and the pleasures of sin? He leaves them to “their own way,” and they are “filled with their own devices^e.” Do they observe Him? Do they obey His admonitions, and cherish his counsels? He comes to them more intimately; He abides with them more constantly; they advance “from strength to strength, and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion^f.” From these let me take you to the matured

^b Gen. vi. 3.^c Exod. xx. 5.^d Eph. iv. 21.^e Prov. i. 31.^f Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

Christian, for in him it is most manifest, that of the grace of the Spirit all the disciples of the Redeemer are partakers ; that the Holy Ghost is the Comforter to every follower of the Lamb. Behold him, beneath the long torture of lingering disease, and painful wreck of nature, calm, gentle, yea, smiling in his anguish. Behold him bereft of a darling child ; of a bosom friend ; of the desire of his eyes, at a stroke ; yet, repressing every murmur, and anxious, chiefly, to improve his afflictions to the advancement of his virtue, and glory of his God. Is it in nature, to be patient after this manner ? Though philosophy may teach men with hardy fortitude to bear the stroke, can she teach them with such meekness to kiss the rod ? Behold him, bringing into subjection every inordinate passion, and decking himself with every godlike virtue, till the bosom of lust, anger, envy, pride, and malice, is converted to a scene of purity and benevolence. See him, raised to spiritual communion with his Maker, till his heart is filled with a seraph's love ; and his countenance, like that of Moses, shines with the reflection of the glory he has contemplated. Approach him in his final hour, and behold him, meeting death with such a holy and heavenly composure, as almost exhibits the saint " made perfect^g," on this side heaven ; and compels us to admire, where we went to mourn. Is it in our feeble nature, to rise to such majesty ? Though reason may enable us to submit quietly to death, can she teach us to rejoice in it, to triumph over it with joy ? Though nature may fill us with fear of God, and awful reverence ; can she shed abroad such love of Him in the heart ? Though philosophy may teach us to be brave, disinterested, and generous, can she teach us to be humble ? Can she

^f Heb. xii. 23.

enable us to be pure? No. “In us, (that is, in our flesh,) dwelleth no good thing^h.” The Christian finds in himself a new and wonderful creation. He is conscious it is something which he did not, by his own power alone, produce. There is Divinity in it. In the calm hour of contemplation, he surveys the operation in his mind: and, wrapping himself in his mantle, like Elijah listening to the “still small voiceⁱ,” perceives that it is the Spirit of God.

Our time would fail us for the duties which yet remain to be performed upon this holy festival, if we were now to pursue this subject further; but, by Divine permission, it shall be concluded in the Afternoon.

^h Rom. vii. 18.

ⁱ 1 Kings xix. 12.

SERMON LII.

—◆—
ON WHITSUNDAY.
—◆—

JOHN iv. 14.

But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

HAVING seen, in our observations on this text, this morning, the reality and necessity of the gift of the Spirit, to all true believers of every age, let us consider its inestimable value, and importance. Given to enlighten, to purify, and to comfort us, it is satisfactory, and it is perennial.

We are formed with desires, and fitted for attainments, which nothing here can satisfy or complete. Our minds are framed for knowledge. We need it; and have a natural bent to seek it. But, of the subjects upon which we fix our most inquisitive attention, and are most concerned to investigate, nature leaves us deplorably ignorant. Of ourselves, our duty, our hopes, and our destination, unaided reason can give us little information that will not distress us. It tells us, we are mortal, though capable of perpetual improvement; but it discovers nothing certain beyond the grave. It suggests that we are moral; but can neither define right, nor promise aid or reward to virtue. It teaches us that we are creatures and dependents: but it brings us not to our Maker; it leaves us less acquainted with Him, than

with ourselves. We are in a region of obscurity. All is enigmatical in ourselves. All is perplexing in the scenes and events around us. We go to the streamlet of this belief to-day, and of that system to-morrow, and return again to the changing rivulets of our own imaginations. But none of them satisfy. We drink of their waters, and thirst again. It is not till the Spirit of the Gospel enlightens our minds; it is not till the Comforter has guided us into truth, that we find rest from our wanderings and are satisfied. Established by the Holy Ghost in the faith of the Gospel, and embued, through His power, with its heavenly principles, the Christian has in him a perpetual spring of peace and joy. The knowledge drawn from the founts, to which the Spirit conducts him, answers all his necessities. He drinks of this water, and thirsts no more. The views of God, of life, of salvation, of righteousness, and of heaven, which this Instructor of the ignorant sets before him, and enables his understanding to apprehend, become in him as "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Again. Our desire of happiness is even stronger than our desire of knowledge. But how vain is the chase, upon which our passions and the world put us, for the gratification of this desire. Alienated from the love of God, and having his moral faculties impaired, man has lost by the Fall, both the knowledge and relish of his chief good. He roves awhile in all the paths of earthly pursuit, seeking in each the satisfaction he has not found in others, and murmuring successively at the barrenness of all. The reason is, the soul cannot be satisfied with the pleasures and attainments of this sublunary world. They are carnal. They mock its expectations. They are uncertain and transient, subjecting it to perpetual disappointments. They cannot satisfy us. He that

drinketh of them, thirsts again ; and though he be admitted to them all, and take of each most copious draughts, yet, still he thirsts. There is a void which is not filled. There is a feverish anxiety, which is not removed. There is a weariness, under which he yet wants refreshment. It is not till the heart has found its Saviour, and the Comforter whom He sends has taken possession of it, that man knows the source of true happiness, and is able to enjoy it. I see him, in his eager pursuit of gratification, meeting, in many a path, with fruit which is pleasant to the eye, and seemingly good for food, yea, and desirable to make one wise^a. Passion urges him to take and eat. Yet, if he do so, death is the consequence. What is to enable him to repress his inclinations, and refrain from indulgence, but the restraining grace of the Spirit of holiness ? I see him, amidst the splendours which have crowned his worldly projects, and the joys which have been opened to him by his success, conscious of sinfulness, and responsibility, and sighing in the hour of sober reflection, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ^b ? ” Where shall he find happiness, but under the influences of that Comforter, which says to the trembling offender, “ Thy sins be forgiven thee ^c,” and into the chambers of the bosom, where were gathered the darkness and terrors of despondence, pours the beam of eternal hope ? I see him, bending under affliction’s stroke. Misfortune has snatched from him the prosperities of his life ; or death has bereaved him of the kindred being,—the beloved friend, who was dearer to him than all life’s prosperities. Philosophy comes to him. She tells him, his fate is irreversible, and it is folly to repine. Ah, this only aggravates his woe. Reason discourses

^a Gen. iii. 6.^b Rom. vii. 24.^c Matt. ix. 2.

with him of the alleviations of his trouble; and of the duties and joys which remain. It is the voice of a charmer, to which the ear of sorrow is deaf. Thou only, O Holy Ghost, art the Comforter who canst bind up the breach in his happiness, and heal the anguish of his wound. Thou diffusest thy soothing influences through his bosom, and its perturbations are still. Thou conductest him to the fountains of consolation, which God has blessed. He drinks of the waters, and his spirits are refreshed. Thou biddest him look up, and showest him a clear, and peaceful, and unvarying sky above the clouds and blackness, which are rolling away. He beholds; and wipes away his tears, and says, ‘Blessed Spirit, abide with me for ever.’ I see him, on the brink of the grave; sustaining the conflicts of his final hour. His body is agonized with the torture of disease; his faith and patience are assailed by the enemy; the angel of death is approaching with his dismaying step, and appalling aspect. It is an awful hour. What can sustain him but the everlasting arm? Who can preserve his soul in composure, and light up in it, when it is taking its flight, the smiles of peace, but the Spirit who hath said, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee^d.” As a Comforter, to whom man may go for strength amidst dangers, encouragement amidst difficulties, freedom from terrors, and support under adversities, there is none worthy of his confidence but the Holy Ghost. The pardon, salvation, and immortality, of which He assures us, and to a participation of which we are sealed by Him, are the well-springs of all durable

^d Isaiah xliii. 2.

and satisfactory joy. Without these we shall, in our pursuit of happiness, roam wildly, and perpetually thirst. Until the peace of God is shed abroad in the heart, we may drink of all the streamlets of pleasure which are accessible to us, but we shall thirst again. The soul must find its rest from its anxieties and fears, before we can be satisfied. This rest it finds, when the Comforter dwelleth in it: for His gracious influences are the sure antidotes to fear, and dissatisfaction; and the light of His countenance, is the source of peace. "With Thee is the well of life: and in Thy light shall we see light^e."

This brings me to observe, further, in illustration of the inestimable value, and importance of the gift of the Spirit, that it is His office to sanctify us wholly, in spirit, soul, and body. Descending on us in baptism, He consecrates us unto God; and if He be not resisted and grieved, becomes in us the living principle of goodness and truth, and qualifies us for God's heavenly kingdom. Man is apprehensive of his accountability. When the paths of virtue are placed before him, he sees their excellence, and conscience whispers that, if he would please his Maker, he must walk therein. But, from each of these paths, he has wandered; in all of them, he has fallen. There is a feebleness of his will, an insubordination of his passions, a prostitution and confusion of his powers, and consequently an impurity of his nature, which unfits him for the holy abode and presence of his Maker. It is the office of the Spirit to move upon this chaos of his condition; to reduce the confusion to regularity; to dissipate the impurity, and sublimate the affections; and into the dark mass, that is "without form, and void^f," to introduce order, and beauty, and meekness, for the Divine approbation.

^e Psalm xxxvi. 9.

^f Gen. i. 2.

Hence, “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost^g,” are connected as contemporaneous, and co-operative means of our salvation. Hence, the earnestness with which we are exhorted to seek and cherish the Spirit, by the tenor of many portions of the Old, and the explicit instructions of the New Testament. It is through this Spirit alone, that we are enabled to recover ourselves to a state of faith and obedience, and to become renewed in our minds “after the image of Him that created us^h.” He sets apart the faithful to the service of the Most High, and renders them meet for His use and favour. Without His aid they can attain to no excellency; and without the shadow of His wing, can be in no safety. By Him they are “sealed unto the day of redemptionⁱ.” And in that solemn day of the consummation, to which we are all rapidly hastening, none will be partakers of “the joy of the Lord^k,” who have not, in the principles of their minds, and conduct of their lives, the impression of this sacred seal. But in behalf of all those, who have sure evidence that they bear it, the Apostle proclaims, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father^l.”

Now, it is to be added, that in all His beneficial influences the Spirit is perennial. His truth, instructions, and promises, and sanctifying graces are indissoluble and eternal. All the other streams to which man recurs for knowledge and for happiness, are transitory. They are for ever changing. When the wind bloweth, they are agitated. When the earth is shaken, they are turned into other channels. When the rains are withheld, they are dried up.

^g Titus iii. 5.

^h Col. iii. 10.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 30.

^k Matt. xxv. 21.

^l Rom. viii. 15.

But the river of God is full of water. It never faileth. Its source is as independent as the existence, as eternal as the duration, and as exhaustless as the perfections of God. It is the same upon the mountain, and in the valley; it loses not its efficacy in the tempest or the calm. If at any time we suffer an interruption of its refreshing influences, the inconstancy is in us, not in the waters, which for ever flow on in their course. Like their humble type, they follow the people of God in all the windings of their journey, and variations of their state, until they are brought to the promised land. Other things fail. Time, and misfortune, and death, have an evil action upon all the sources of man's temporal expectations and joys. But the water, which, through the Redeemer, is given unto him, will "be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

I have now endeavoured to set before you some evidences of the reality and necessity of the gift of the Spirit to believers, in every age; and some considerations which may illustrate its inestimable value and importance. If I have been successful, you will, with the woman of Samaria, be ready to say to your Redeemer, "Give me this water, that I thirst not^m;" and will yet indulge me with your patience, while I point out the channels, through which it ordinarily flows. I say the ordinary channels: for that the Deity is not limited by His own appointments, but may, and sometimes does, accomplish His purposes towards men in an extraordinary manner, it would be presumptuous to deny. But it is in the channels, through which He hath ordained His spiritual blessings to flow, that we are to seek them: and those channels are His word, and the ordinances, and prayer.

^m John iv. 15.

“ Faith,” the first principle of the new life, “ cometh,” saith the Apostle, “ by hearing ; and hearing, by the word of God ^u.” It is in the Scriptures, that the truths we are to receive ; the motives by which we are to be influenced ; the graces we are to cultivate ; the hopes we are to cherish ; and the purity and happiness after which we are to aspire,— are collected, described and deposited by the Holy Spirit. In them the doctrines and promises, the instructions and consolations, which came down from heaven, are placed by Him, as it were, in a reservoir, that in and by them He might the more consistently with the laws of our nature, carry on His great work of enlightening, purifying, and comforting the human race. Here the Apostle speaks of some of his converts, as begotten by the word : and Jesus, in a prayer for His followers, said, “ Sanctify them through Thy truth : Thy word is truth ^o.” To the word of God, therefore, as it is found in the writings which He hath inspired, and preached by those to whom the ministration of it is committed, we should give the most earnest heed, and diligent attention. “ Blessed is the man,” whose “ delight is in the law of the Lord,” and who hath it in his meditation “ day and night ;” for “ he shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, that will bring forth his fruit in due season ^p.”

Having acquired faith and knowledge from the revelations of truth, Baptism is the appointed laver of regeneration, in which we are washed from the stain of sin, and begotten anew in Christ, unto the inheritance of the Holy Spirit. In this ordinance, the Comforter is made our own ; and were it not for the inordinateness of our passions, and the perverseness of our wills, He would abide constantly with all those

^u Rom. x. 17.

^o John xvii. 17.

^p Psalm i. 1—3.

whose interest in His graces has, in this sacrament, been sealed to them on the behalf of God. They are, in this ordinance, made the children of God by “adoption;” “and because they are sons, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, whereby they cry, Abba, Father^q.” “Repent, and be baptized,” says St. Peter, “and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost^r.” In Confirmation, the title, which before was in the hands of guardians, is put into our own hands, and we enter actively upon the enjoyment of the inheritance.

Having been thus conceived unto a new life by the word of God, and “born again of water and the Spirit^s,” we need sustenance to nourish and comfort us, unto eternal life. This spiritual refreshment, the faithful receive in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. At that table, the Spirit waits to distribute His refreshing and enlivening graces. In that ordinance, we receive the pardon; we recognize the truths; we enjoy in figure the promises, by which the Comforter enlightens and strengthens, consoles and sanctifies us. In and by the precious streams, which flow for us around the altar, He enters the hearts of the redeemed, and becomes in them “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

There is not time that we should tarry on the sides of these channels of the Spirit, to mark their depth, their course, their accessibleness, and their happy adaptation to our nature in its present state. Suffice it to observe, that they are pointed out in Scripture as the fountains, to which we are to have recourse for the waters, which Christ has to give; and, as such, have been acknowledged, guarded, and kept open by the Church, from her earliest existence.

^q Gal. iv. 6.; Rom. viii. 15.

^r Acts ii. 38.

^s John iii. 3, 5.

I add, that Prayer is another great and appointed means of bringing down upon us the blessings of the Holy Spirit. In the context, it is intimated, that we must ask, if we would receive, the water which our Redeemer gives. In many other places of Scripture, this is most explicitly declared. “ Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full †.” “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him †?” Indeed, if it be inquired why, with such great and glorious resources in their power, men generally fall so short of the perfection of righteousness and peace, I fear, the cause of it will be found to be, either that they do not recur to the channels of grace, which have been mentioned, or that they recur to them without frequent, earnest, importunate prayer for the blessing of God.

We have now finished our remarks upon this important subject. Upon a review of what has been said, how interesting, how solemn, how momentous the inquiry, Have we received the Holy Ghost? This you will answer, not by adverting to occasional transports of devotion, fervours of enthusiasm, or supposed illapses of the Spirit, which generally proceed from heated imaginations and unenlightened zeal: but by looking in yourselves for those “ fruits of the Spirit,” by which His presence can be certainly known. These are said in the Gospel to be, “ love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance †,” and such like.

By the absence of these fruits, are we obliged to apprehend that, in our bosoms, the Comforter has not His abode. It is an awful apprehension. Let us ask ourselves, whether we have sought Him in

† John xvi. 24.

‡ Luke xi. 13.

§ Gal. v. 22, 23.

the ways, in which He is to be found. Do we study with meekness, and receive with affection, the word of God? Have we performed, as well as we have been able, our baptismal vows? Are we constant guests at the table of the Lord, whenever it is spread? And do we humbly, and often, “bow our knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,—that He would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;” that we may “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God^y.” If we have refused to avail ourselves of the means, which He hath so graciously provided for obtaining that, which is of such inestimable value, can we wonder that the blessing is withheld; or, perhaps, after having been some time enjoyed by us, is taken away?

Do we find in our hearts and lives, the “fruits of the Spirit?” Let us rejoice with humble joy. Let us give all diligence to keep the inestimable gift. Christians, you will be encompassed with temptations, while you continue in the flesh. Cherish the graces of the Holy Spirit, that when you are weak, through the frailty of your nature, you may in His power be strong. Christians, you will, in all probability, be overtaken by affliction, while you are journeying to the place of your rest. Cherish the presence of the Holy Comforter, that, when under the heavy strokes of its chastening hand you are ready to faint, you may, beside the waters to which He will lead you, find refreshment and peace. Christians, the hour is coming, when you shall be compelled to enter the “valley of the shadow of death^z.” Cherish the friendship of the Spirit of God, the only friend who can go with you into that

^y Eph. iii. 14—19.

^z Psalm xxiii. 4.

valley, and be of any use to you there. Cherish His friendship, that you may be raised above the fears and sufferings of that tremendous vale, by His consoling testimony, witnessing with your spirits, that you are the children of God^a.

^a Rom. viii. 16.

SERMON LIII.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

I THESSALONIANS V. 19.

Quench not the Spirit.

By the event, which the Church this day commemorates, our attention is turned to that glorious mystery of the Christian economy, the descent of the Spirit of God to dwell in men. The visible manifestation of Him on the day of Pentecost, was the commencement of His perpetual abode with the faithful. It was the dispensing of the excellent gift, of which every sincere disciple of the Redeemer is a partaker: for though “the sound as of a rushing mighty wind” be no more heard, nor the “cloven tongues like as of fire^a” seen: yet is the Holy Ghost in the heart of every Christian in a “still small voice^b,” asserting His presence, and waiting to sanctify them wholly, if they will co-operate with His sacred influence. “I will pray the Father,” says Christ to His infant Church, “and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever^c.” “The promise,” says St. Peter, “is to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call^d.” “Because ye are sons,” says

^a Acts ii. 2, 3.

^b 1 Kings xix. 12.

^c John xiv. 16.

^d Acts ii. 39.

St. Paul, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." And in allusion to the appearance with which the Comforter came upon the Apostles, he exhorts the Thessalonians in the text, "Quench not the Spirit." From which passages and many others of a similar sense, as well as from the nature of the Gospel scheme, and the observations of those who have watched the course of the Christian life; it is abundantly evident, that every believer has an interest in that precious gift, which, on the day of Pentecost, was poured out upon the Church, so far as it was a source of light, and purity, and comfort, to those who received it. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal^f."

But how says the Apostle, "Quench not the Spirit?" Is the grace of God resistible? Can man withstand, and turn away the operations of the Holy Ghost? Yes, certainly; unless the exhortation in the text, and very many of the cautions and denunciations in the Sacred Volume be insignificant, and man, as to faith and virtue, a mere machine. We are made rational and moral beings. As such, God contemplates us in all His dispensations. To induce, not force, our understandings; to assist, not compel us to be virtuous; is His purpose in the gift of His Holy Spirit. This is accomplished, by setting the truth before us, and enabling us to discern it; by stirring up virtuous affections in us, and by the most persuasive motives, urging us to "refuse the evil, and choose the good^g." But in our nature we know there are principles opposed to this good Spirit of God. We have ever a tempter within us. And if, when the Holy Ghost invites, and would conduct us to the way of truth and holiness, and "the lust of

^g Gal. iv. 6.

^f 1 Cor. xii. 7.

^g Isa. vii. 15.

the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life^h," urges us into devious paths, we prefer the latter, we are capable of wandering in them, and may fall therein. To deprive us of the power of choosing, would be to destroy the moral freedom, which constitutes us accountable beings, and so render our rational faculties useless. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselvesⁱ," to save or sanctify ourselves. Our spiritual life is dependent on God. But, in like manner, is our natural life. He is the source from whom our daily existence flows. Without the support of His upholding power, we could not be. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being^k." Yet if any man, considering that the power of the Almighty is the support of his life, and that without this support, his own exertions would be ineffectual, should neglect to be cautious amidst the dangers to which he is exposed, and forbear to use the means of sustaining life, which the Deity has provided,—what would be the consequence? He would soon find that his concurrence with the Divine providence is ordinarily necessary to the preservation of life, and that by negligence or the abuse of his faculties, he would perish. So is it with respect to spiritual life. The Spirit of God is the great source of regeneration. By His grace we are saved, and renewed "after the image of Him that created us^l." But this mighty work is not ordinarily accomplished without the concurrence of our will and affections. And if we are at liberty to concur, and this concurrence be ordinarily requisite by the constitution of the Gospel, we may neglect or refuse to do it, and render the admonitions and influence of the Spirit ineffectual, If it be not so, wherefore is the Almighty introduced

^h 1 John ii. 16.ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 5.^k Acts xvii. 28.^l Col. iii. 10.

in Scripture, as saying: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man"^m?" Must He not have met with opposition in the hearts of men, and been wearied with their iniquities? Wherefore are they who were "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"ⁿ," said to be "unto every good work reprobate."^o Did the voice, which some time or other speaks in all, not speak in them, and were they without the offer of that aid by which only they could be saved, left to perish? Wherefore are we exhorted, not to "resist," not to "grieve"^p;" not to "quench the Spirit:" and, instead of being encouraged to trust indolently to His operations, because it is He who "worketh in us both to will and to do"^q;" why are we required, by this very consideration, to be anxiously active in "working out our own salvation"^r?" Are all these pious artifices to keep us employed? Are they requisitions, on our compliance with which, the end they propose to secure, does not at all depend? In short, if the influences of the Spirit cannot be frustrated, why are not Christians altogether blameless, seeing He is ever willing and at hand? Why is the voice of the Holy Comforter in any case unheard, or heard without effect? That His friendly desires may be rendered ineffectual by man, the Scriptures do evidently suggest; that they are rendered ineffectual, the lives of men do too often fully prove.

It is important then, that we be informed of the ways, in which we are liable to "quench the Spirit."

And this we may do by our heedlessness. If we do not admit and hear, cherish and obey the sacred admonitions of the Comforter, we may bring ourselves into the danger of being deprived of them. Though the manner of His operations is mysterious

^m Gen. vi. 3.

ⁿ Heb. iii. 13.

^o Titus i. 16.

^p Eph. iv. 30.

^q Phil. ii. 13.

^r Phil. ii. 12.

it is nevertheless sensible. In the chaos of our nature, He moves upon the face of the deep: and if the clamour of the passions be silenced, and the mind attentive and still, His voice may be heard, raising our affections to the Deity, and teaching us to trust in His goodness, and secure His favour: calling to us, to turn from the base and ruinous paths of vice, and commending to us the ways of virtue: assuring us of the importance of our eternal concerns, and disposing us to make a timely provision for their safety. If these suggestions of the Holy Spirit be indulged, and we improve them by the instructions of the word He has dictated, the heavenly Friend will take up His abode in our hearts, and favour us with new, and fuller communications of Himself. For it is a declared principle of the Christian economy that, to him “that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.” But if we disregard His counsels; if, immersed in the vanities of life, we suffer Him to lift up His voice in vain; if when He calls, we refuse to hear; if when He stretches out His hand, we do not regard it: His slighted influences He will justly withhold, and leave us to pursue our own course, and reap the fruit of our own devices.

Again. The Spirit may be quenched by that pride, which fills men with a confidence in their own understandings, and a complacent attachment to the imaginations of their hearts. There are many, who, when they attend to the truths of religion, are sensibly warmed with a conviction of their excellence, and in the management of life are impressed with a knowledge of their obligations to virtue, and checked in their inclinations to vice. They hear distinctly the voice within them, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and

when ye turn to the left¹." But the pride of fallen nature renders them superior to a counsellor. The arch adversary enables this, his prime minister in the hearts of men, to persuade them, that the restraints which are about them, and the emotions of goodness, are the prejudices of education, and superstitious fears. They, therefore, prefer the guidance of their own minds, and pursue their own projects, against every remonstrance. No wonder, then, that the counsels of the Comforter are turned away. The Spirit of God will not enter into competition with the reason of man. It is the duty of the latter to prostrate itself before Him. Whatever truths are contained in the word which He has inspired, should be embraced; whatever path is approved, in the instructions of life which He has given, should be pursued; whatever conduct is required by the dictates of conscience, in which He speaks, should be observed; however discordant with the vanity of our minds, and imaginations of our evil heart. Conscious of our frailty, we should be meek. Reverencing His perfection, we should be docile. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

Further. The Spirit may be quenched by our habitual, or presumptuous sins. If we defile this body, which He condescends to inhabit, by surrendering it to evil and corrupt affections, it becomes unfit for His presence. The fire of His love will not burn on the heart, on which incense is offered by the passions to vice. The light of His truth will not shine in the bosom, which is polluted with iniquity. Besides, to subdue the dominion of sin, is the great purpose for which He dwells with men. Every voluntary transgression is, therefore, a counteraction of His work, a league with His foe:—a foe,

¹ Isa. xxx. 21.

² James iv. 6.

which, for our sakes, He has undertaken to destroy. While we continue in this league, we do “despite unto the Spirit of grace^x,” and may expect a diminution, and, at length, a loss of His friendly admonitions and aid. For those frailties of nature, from which none are free; for those errors of infirmity, into which we may inadvertently fall, He has compassion. He waits at the door of our hearts, to guard us from these; and when they surprise us, He pities our weakness. But by those habitual vices, in which some allow themselves to live, and those presumptuous sins, which others commit in violation of their conscience, and the instructions of God, He is grieved and offended. “Into a malicious soul,” says the author of the Book of Wisdom, “He will not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin. The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in^y.”

I observe, lastly, that we may “quench the Spirit,” by neglecting to recur often to the channels through which His graces are usually communicated. Such a guide and Comforter is worthy to be sought. By neglecting the appointed means of grace, we, in a strict sense, deprive ourselves of His services. If we do not study “the word of God,” when it is declared to be written by the Spirit of truth, and to be the “incorruptible seed of which we are born again^z :”—if we neglect to join the assembly of the saints, when Christ has promised that, “where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be in the midst of them^a :”—if we neither seek the blessing of the Spirit in acts of public, nor of private worship,

^x Heb. x. 29.

^y 1 Pet. i. 23.

^z Wisd. i. 4, 5.

^a Matt. xviii. 20.

when we are expressly taught to “ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not^b :”—if we use not the holy sacraments, which are provided in the Church, when we know, or should know that they are ‘outward visible signs of an inward spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof :’—if we neglect to recur with proper dispositions to these many appointed means of obtaining the Spirit :—the probability is, that His place in our hearts will be occupied by the cares and vanities of life : the holy fire, which once may have burned in our bosoms, will be liable to go out : He will leave us to “our own way,” and, oh most unhappy portion ! we shall “be filled” with the fruit of “our own devices^c .”

You see, then, that you may resist the Spirit ; and in how many ways it may be quenched. Let me, I pray you, with some portion of the Apostle’s concern, enforce his important caution by a few weighty, and affecting considerations.

In the first place ; this Spirit, which you are exhorted not to quench, is the principle of a new and eternal life ; the holy source of knowledge, purity, and consolation. Hence He is styled, with reference to His offices among men, the Paraclete or Comforter : and hence, His visible descent, as at this time, upon the Apostles, was a pledge to the whole Church of something, which should be to her, in her militancy, a substitute for her absent Lord. Yes, ye lovers of virtue, conscious of the corruption and infirmity of your nature, here is the pledge of “grace sufficient for you^d .” The Spirit of God is sent forth for your help. The light, which this Spirit diffuses, must guide you to truth, and enamour you of goodness.

^b James i. 5.^c Prov. i. 31.^d 2 Cor. xii. 9.

He moves upon the chaos of your disordered nature, and light springeth forth from the darkness; order taketh place of the confusion of the passions, and moral beauty and progressive holiness appear, where all was anarchy and dismaying corruption. Yes, children of sorrow, who, amidst the disappointments and bereavements of life, find nature weak, and anguish strong, you have here assurance of an heavenly Comforter. The Spirit, which 'proceedeth from the Father and the Son,' is a Spirit of consolation. Upon the afflicted soul, which looks to Heaven for help, He will descend; and at His voice, the tumult of its sorrows will subside, and the perturbed bosom be hushed to a calm. Yes, faithful Christian, journeying rapidly to the tomb, you have here the earnest of Almighty aid in that hour, when nature needs all the assistance which heaven and earth can give, the hour of death. Your Master, at His ascension, hath been taken from your head, and you have been left, with more than the Prophet's affection, to exclaim, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" But, behold; His Spirit resteth upon His followers. If ye take up the mantle He has left you in His word and sacraments, ye shall, in the power of this Spirit, go "on your way rejoicing^f;" and when ye are brought to the stream, which separates you from your home, shall be able to smite the waters and pass over untouched by their waves^g. Oh benighted mortals, encumbered with imperfections, enveloped in darkness, and trembling at the approach of death, "Quench not the Spirit."

Again. The dignity of the Comforter, and the price at which His renewing influences upon our fallen race were procured, should deter us from grieving, or resisting the Spirit. He is the Spirit of

^g 2 Kings ii. 12.

^f Acts viii. 39.

^g 2 Kings ii. 14.

God ; and to purchase His restoration to the souls of men, the Son of God expired. What is this event, which we have, to-day, been commemorating at yonder holy table ? Even the death of Christ ; not only to expiate our past transgressions, but to procure that reconciliation and return of the Spirit of God to our offending souls, whereby we may walk in newness of life. As the reward of His obedience and sufferings, Christ received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost ; and, as an earnest of the blessing to His whole Church, shed forth that, on the day of Pentecost, of which you have this day heard. Oh ye, who have been at the cross of your Redeemer, and have witnessed the price at which the descent of the Comforter upon the hearts of sinful man, was procured, “ Quench not the Spirit.”

Finally. It is by this Spirit, that the ransomed of the Lord “ are sealed unto the day of redemption^h.” Strive then to obtain this Seal, and be careful to preserve it, by walking with humble minds in the paths of Christian obedience ; listening, always, to His friendly admonitions within you, and suffering nothing to turn you aside from the paths of holiness, which, in the word of God, He hath marked out for your feet. And Thou, O blessed Spirit, who, as at this time, didst descend upon the first followers of the Lamb, vouchsafe, for His sake, to descend and rest upon our hearts. Bear with our imperfections. Elevate and purify our desires. Enlighten us in ignorance. Comfort us in sorrow. Guide us in life, and sustain us in that hour, when death shall separate us from this scene of probation for ever and ever.

^h Eph. iv. 30.

SERMON LIV.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

ACTS ii. 33.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

THESE words are a part of that animated sermon of St. Peter's, which converted three thousand persons to the Christian faith. It was delivered on that memorable occasion, when the Church received from her Lord, His richest and most precious gift. With simple, yet awful grandeur, the Holy Ghost, sent forth by the Saviour, had descended upon His Apostles, while in the exercise of faith and love, they were waiting for the fulfilment of their Master's promise. Uncandid and amazed, the multitude gave to the occurrence and its effects, the most unreasonable and blasphemous construction. This roused the ardour of St. Peter, and led him, in a very frank, eloquent and pious discourse, to declare to them, that the same Jesus, whom they had lately crucified, was the Messiah; that God had, in exact fulfilment of the predictions of the Prophets, raised Him from the dead; that He had been constituted in heaven, "both Lord and Christ^a;" and that,

^a Acts ii. 36.

“ being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He had shed forth that, which they then saw and heard.”

In commemoration of this miraculous and important event, the day of Pentecost has, from the first ages of Christianity, been solemnized by the Church: and under the significant name of Whitsunday, is ranked amongst her most joyful festivals. Let us, my brethren, employ our thoughts upon the great purposes, to which this event had reference, and, if any instructions may be deduced from the circumstances of it, let us lay them up in our hearts.

In the first place, the miraculous effusion of the Divine Spirit, was the strongest attestation of our Saviour's ascension into heaven. On the last Lord's day, we saw the importance of this article of our faith, to the design and perfection of Christianity. Our blessed Lord, desirous of giving to His Church the fullest evidence of His glorification, assured His disciples before His departure from the earth, that in testimony of His exaltation, He would send them a blessing which could come only from above, “ even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father^b,” and should be in, and abide with them for ever. On this test, He might have rested the certainty of His ascension, and, consequently, of our dearest hopes. It was a test, to which there could be no exception. If, in token of His ascension into heaven, He would send to His followers such gifts, as could come only from thence, who would be able to doubt, that He was there arrived? If, in demonstration of His accession to His kingdom in heaven, He would exhibit incontrovertible evidences of supremacy, who would be able to deny,

^b John xv. 26.

that “ the Father had given all things into His hand^o?” With holy confidence, the disciples waited for these fruits of the ascension; “ and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, were all with one accord in one place^d.” He was “ faithful who had promised^e.” The great attestation of His “ being by the right hand of God exalted,” was heard, was seen, was felt, and was acknowledged. The Divine Spirit with expressive majesty descended. In visible form it rested upon the Apostles, and produced in their minds and conduct most wonderful effects. This great miracle, then, preserves and strengthens the basis upon which Christianity rests. In this we have the strongest proof of our Redeemer’s entrance into heaven, in our behalf. This is indisputable evidence of the glorious truth, that the “ Captain of our salvation^f,” has “ ascended on high, has led captivity captive, has received gifts for men^g.”

Another grand purpose of this miraculous effusion of the Spirit was to qualify the Apostles for the arduous duties, which, after Christ’s reception into heaven, were devolved upon them. His Church was to be established in the world. They were to be His witnesses among all people. Through them His religion was to be maintained and propagated; the tidings of salvation to be conveyed to all nations. They stood in need, therefore, of supernatural endowments. Their ministry required for the successful discharge of it, the aid of power from on high. It was necessary that the life, the doctrines, and the precepts of their Redeemer, should be transmitted to posterity. Destitute of human assistance, and subject to like frailties as other men, how could these primitive disciples have accom-

^o John iii. 35.

^d Acts ii. 1.

^e Heb. xi. 11.

^f Heb. ii. 10.

^g Psalm lxxviii. 18.

plished this important work without error or omission, unless the Holy Ghost had “brought all things to their remembrance^b,” and “guided them into all truthⁱ?” It was necessary, that they should publish the Gospel to people whom they had not known, and in countries with which they were utterly unacquainted. Illiterate, most of them, even in their mother tongue, how could they have preached, and preached with eloquence to the inhabitants of all climes, but by being enabled to use all “tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance^k?” It was necessary, that they should oppose venerated systems, and attack prevalent manners. Poor and friendless, what could have encouraged them, if the Comforter had not “given them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries were not able to gainsay nor resist^l?” In exposing the injustice and falsehood of the Jews; in reproofing the vices of the Gentiles; in condemning opinions endearing to man by habit, by superstition, and by interest, they would unavoidably be exposed to fatigue, to danger, to persecution, and to death. How, then, could they have been animated to their work, and supported under sufferings, at which nature would have recoiled, if they had not been furnished with strength from above, and experienced the truth of their Saviour’s assurance, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world^m?” Thus to qualify, to guide, to encourage and support the Apostles, in their great duty of maintaining and extending the religion of Christ, was one important purpose accomplished in the effusion of the Holy Ghost. It was an end worthy of the great miracle. The reality of the occurrence was evidenced by the effects of it; for while yet the “cloven tongues, like as of fireⁿ,” were vi-

^b John xiv. 26.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 15.

^k Ibid. xvi. 13.

^l Matt. xxviii. 20.

^m Acts ii. 4.

ⁿ Acts ii. 3.

sible, multitudes abandoning their friends, their interest, and their ease, believed: and before seventy years had elapsed after the ascension of the Redeemer, “the feet of those who brought good tidings, and published peace^o,” had trodden all parts of the known world. Without supernatural aid, the rapid extension of Christianity, in the way in which it was extended, could never have been accomplished; and those endowments which were shed upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, were peculiarly adapted to the purpose, and adequate to the amazing effects which were produced. It was “the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes^p.”

Once more. When the Comforter was given visibly to the Apostles, it was an earnest of the fulfilment of the promise, to be found only in the Gospel of Christ, that the Divine Spirit will be ever ready to instruct the sincere in the season of inquiry; to strengthen the virtuous in the hour of temptation; and to comfort the good man in the day of adversity. A moment’s reflection will convince us, that man, in his present state, is able but imperfectly to investigate the truths, which it most concerns him to know. Reason, at the best, has but a limited range, and there are passions and prejudices, which most unhappily, weaken and bias its operations. Equally evident is it, that our nature is feeble of itself, to defend the fortresses of virtue against the artifices and assaults of vice. “In many things we offend all^q,” and the best of our race have bemoaned their inability to bring to perfection even those virtues, which their minds and their hearts approve. And who has not known, how hard the struggles with which the soul supports itself under

^o Isa. lii. 7.

^p Psalm cxviii. 23.

^q James iii. 2.

the afflictions, which darken its prospects, and blast its joys? In ease and prosperity it is strong; but in trouble it faints; and the cup, which should be to it as a medicine of life, it converts, by the stubbornness of its will, into a potion of maddening anguish, or impious discontent. . A consideration of these truths, led the wisest of the heathens to think it necessary, that the gods should invisibly guide, and comfort the virtuous. And every person, who soberly contemplates man, groaning under the burden of sin, under the pressure of affliction, and under the consciousness of mortality, must perceive amongst its most pressing necessities the want of some source of knowledge, holiness, and consolation, greater and more constant, than any thing which frail nature finds in itself. But who, except the adorable Being that is “by the right hand of God exalted,” hath “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost?” The purchase and gift of the Comforter was the work of Christ. Enriching His religion with a boon no where else to be found, He hath taught mankind, that upon honest inquiry, active virtue, and humble sorrow, the Spirit of God will ever bestow its needed aid and blessing. The precious promise is His gift to His Church; purchased for us with His blood, and bestowed upon the redeemed of every place and generation. And the miraculous descent of the Comforter, on the day of Pentecost, was the confirmation of this joyful doctrine. It was expedient for the conviction of the multitude, and for rendering the fulfilment of the promises apparent, that at the first full effusion there should be a visible and significant descent. He came, to be to the Church in her militant state, the holy substitute for her absent Lord; and, in every soul which is willing to become a temple for His abode, He is ready to

dwell ; illumining and cheering it with His heavenly influences ; cleansing it from all defilement ; and filling it with love, and hope, and peace. This the whole tenor of the Gospel teaches us. This the Apostles declared, while yet the luminous appearance rested upon them, and the Spirit filled the house where they were assembled. " The promise," said St. Peter to the multitude, " is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call ^r." But the sacred fire, though no longer visible, still burns in the souls of believers. The Spirit which then descended to protect the faith and virtue of the primitive Christians, to furnish them with counsel and strength for the discharge of their duties, and to support them under the trials and troubles which awaited them, is, though invisible, yet at hand, to continue His benevolent offices to all the faithful.

Such are the leading purposes, to which the descent of the Holy Ghost had reference. And whether we consider it, as testifying to us the exaltation of our Lord, or as qualifying the Apostles to publish His Gospel, and establish His Church, or as being an earnest of the readiness of the Holy Spirit to descend, and dwell with all believers, it is an occasion for ardent thanksgiving, and sacred joy. In that view of it, especially, which encourages us to look for this holy Comforter to help our infirmities, and guide us through the difficulties and sorrows of the region of sin and mutability, it is a spring of unspeakable elevation and happiness. But let us not be unmindful of the state of those, to whom the " Spirit of truth and holiness " was sent.

In the first place, they were waiting for Him with faith. Believing the word of their Master, they

^r Acts ii. 39.

^s John xvi. 13. Rom. i. 4.

“tarried in the city of Jerusalem, until they should be endued with power from on high¹.” In like manner, believe ye the declarations of the Gospel. Have confidence in the promises of God. In all the ways which He hath appointed, seek with believing hearts His gracious assistance, and, in due time, you also will receive the Holy Ghost.

Further. The primitive Christians “were of one heart and of one soul.” They observed the same ways; and thought the same things. That divine love reigned in their bosoms, and regulated their actions, which discards whatever is contentious, or unkind; whatever is injurious to our neighbour, or offensive to God. In like manner, be it your endeavour to ‘hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.’ If you would have the Holy Ghost dwell in your hearts, remove therefrom all envious and malevolent passions; all strife and dissension; all impurity, contention, or wrong, which may injure others, or debase yourselves. “For into a malicious soul, He will not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin. The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit,—and will not abide when unrighteousness comes in².”

Finally. For the purposes of devotion, the Apostles “were all with one accord in one place³.” It is prayer and Christian communion, which brings upon the faithful the influences of the Holy Spirit. “If any man lack wisdom,” or strength, or comfort, “let him ask it of God⁴.” In asking for the assistances of the Holy Ghost, he cannot ask amiss; and he has the most express assurance of his Lord, that whatsoever he shall thus ask, “believing, he

¹ Luke xxiv. 49.

² Acts iv. 32.

³ Wisd. i. 4, 5.

⁴ Acts ii. 1.

⁵ James i. 5.

shall receive ^a." If, at the present day, the power of the Holy Spirit is little felt, and the fruits of His influences are little manifested, it is because the ordinances, which are the channels of His graces, are unheeded, or frequented with unholiness: and prayer, the powerful and appointed means of obtaining His aid, is forgotten or neglected. Would you be partakers, with the first disciples, of this extraordinary gift? Imitate their devotion. Form yourselves, as far as the circumstances of your age will admit, after the beautiful model of a Christian Church, which they have left. Like them, "continue stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers ^b."

These are important instructions, to be derived from the state of our fathers and elder brethren in the Church, upon whom, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost descended. Lay them, my Christian hearers, lay them up in your hearts. And now, O Holy Comforter, vouchsafe, unworthy as we are, to descend and dwell in our souls. Increase and establish our faith in the Lord Jesus. Quicken our zeal, and enlighten our minds. Check and restrain us from all evil, and prompt us effectually to every good work. Support and comfort us, under all the allotments of our probation; and by Thy mighty influences, purify us to a meetness for that kingdom of glory, to which our Redeemer is ascended, and where, with the Father, and with Thee, O Holy Ghost! He is worthy to receive glory and honour, dominion and praise, now, henceforth, and for ever.

^a Matt. xxi. 22.

^b Acts ii. 42.

SERMON LV.

ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

ST. JUDE, 3.

That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

THIS epistle of St. Jude is written to all “them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called ^a.” To us it has come; and in it we have an interest, and may find instruction. The assertion it contains of the divinity of our Lord; the striking description it gives of corrupters of the faith, and separatists from the Church; the solemn admonitions it contains to purity and constancy in our principles and practice, and its affecting allusions to past dispensations of God, as illustrative of His government towards His Church, render it a very impressive part of Holy Writ. But chiefly must we admire the solicitude of St. Jude, about the genuine doctrines of the Gospel, as they were delivered by Jesus Christ. For the preservation of these in their original purity, and the exclusion of errors and innovations from the Church, he was filled with holy anxiety. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you,

^a Jude, ver. 1.

and to exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints: for there are certain men crept in unawares,—ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ^b.” Let us take this exhortation for the guide of our present meditations. It will furnish us with some hints, worthy of notice and remembrance.

In the first place, we may remark, that the faith of the Church is immutable. It is the same in every age. The ingenuity of men may form new theories, and divers schemes of salvation. In the proud exercise of their reason, they may attempt to change principles, and rectify revelation. Or in ages of lukewarmness, they may suffer fashion to become an arbitress of opinions, and subject to her capricious influence religious truth. But the counsels and declarations of God are unchangeable. They are “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever^c.” What was the only true faith, in the first ages of Christianity, is the only true faith now. Human reason cannot have added any thing to the revelations of God. Whenever it attempts to mend the work of the Almighty, it can only manifest its own presumption and feebleness, and must leave those, whom it undertakes to guide, in the dangerous state of perplexity and disputation. In forming our religious opinions, whether with regard to doctrinal points, or to the constitution and discipline of the Church, or to the application of practical rules, we should have recourse to the Sacred Volume. Here we may drink at the source of truth; may derive instruction from the fountain head of knowledge. If doubts arise, respecting the coincidence, or interpretation

^b Jude, ver. 3, 4.

^c Heb. xiii. 8.

of any parts of Scripture, they should be discussed by the light which the primitive Church affords. It should be a recommendation of a religious opinion, that it wants novelty; that it is not the offspring of modern discovery: for we may be assured, that there is but one scheme of salvation, but one Gospel of truth; and that this scheme was fully received; that this Gospel was correctly understood by those inspired men, to whom the establishment and care of the Church was first committed. Venerable antiquity is, therefore, a characteristic of religious truth. In every case, the oldest opinion in the Christian Church, is the best. Had this principle been adhered to, the existence of the Holy Trinity; the interest of all men in the mediation of Christ; the divine origin and distinct orders of the Christian Priesthood; and the final administration of a retribution to every man, according to his deeds, would never have been called in question. But the human mind is never at rest. It has been prone from the beginning, to leave the ways and word of God, and “to seek out” for itself “many inventions^d.” “Be not” ye, brethren, “carried about with divers and strange doctrines^e.” “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein^f.” Recur for your opinions to the sacred writings, and to the interpretations and practice of the primitive Church. These means, together with the aid of the Holy Spirit, are the only sure means of coming at “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Again. For those truths of religion, which were received by the Apostles and primitive disciples of our Lord, we are “to contend;” and to contend “earnestly.” But what! is St. Jude a preacher of

^d Eccles. vii. 29.

^e Heb. xiii. 9.

^f Jer. vi. 16.

strife and contention; of bigotry and persecution? No; by no means. It is the duty of every man to love the truth, and that which a man loves, he will cherish with ardour, and protect with resolution. It is also the duty of every man, to set his face against error, especially, against those errors, by which the revelations of God, the blessed words of eternal life, may be endangered or corrupted. This he owes to his Lord, whose cause he is bound by the highest considerations, to protect in its purity and dignity; and he owes it to his neighbour, whom he cannot, consistently with the regard which is due to him, see estranged from the paths "of truth and soberness," without feeling the most lively concern. But in doing this, it is not necessary that he should be filled with animosity, or neglect any dictate of candour or charity towards his fellow men. The same right of judging, which he asserts for himself, he will be careful, when there are not obvious reasons for restraining it, to allow his neighbour to use for himself: and will never permit a discordance of opinion to divert the streams of his benevolence from his brother, but on the contrary will manifest his love, by the "meekness of his wisdom^b," and the disinterestedness of his prayers. But, though he contends for truth with meekness, he will contend firmly. Though he opposes error with candour and charity, he will oppose it "earnestly;" not with any view to personal triumph, or to the exaltation of the party to which he belongs; but with a single eye to the glory of God, and salvation of men, which the predominance of truth alone can accomplish.

There are some persons, who hear all doctrines, and are satisfied with almost all they hear. In a state of easy indifference, they care not to perplex

^f Acts xxvi. 25.

^h James iii. 13.

themselves with laborious inquiries about the doctrines of the Gospel; wishing only that the current of opinions may pass on smoothly, and that they may pass on quietly with it. This lukewarmness is peculiarly incompatible with the spirit of the text. It proceeds from indolence, or spiritual insensibility. Every man is obliged to attend to what his Maker reveals. "The faith which was once delivered unto the saints" must be clear and definite; for we could not otherwise be exhorted to "contend" for it. It must be sublime and interesting; for it relates to the nature of God, and our own salvation. It must be of unspeakable importance; for the Son of God came down from heaven to bring it to us; and the Holy Ghost waits to confirm it in our hearts. Every Christian, therefore, who is awakened by the power of the Gospel, will apply himself sedulously to understand what the will and the revelation of the Lord is. Those fundamental principles of His religion, which were received by "the saints," and have been maintained by the Church in all ages, will be dear to his heart. He will cherish them with such zeal and affection, as he would feel for their adorable Author, were He upon the earth. Delusive and dangerous is the sentiment, that it matters not what are a man's principles, provided his life be good. It is "for the faith," we are charged by the voice of inspiration to "contend." Indeed, hardly will his life be good, whose principles are bad. Though a sound faith may not always render a man what he should be, yet without a sound faith, "it is impossible to please God¹." For he who cometh unto God, unless he would affront the majesty of heaven, must believe the truths which God hath revealed, and live by the doctrines which He hath inculcated.

¹ Heb. xi. 6.

There is, also, a false complaisance, which under the notion of liberality, would disguise the distinctions of things, and amalgamate all the different opinions of men. Liberality, rightly understood, is an amiable disposition of soul. It is fostered by the spirit of Christianity, as the offspring of heaven, and chosen companion of virtue. But there is a dangerous imposing principle which assumes its name. It is a principle, however plausible in appearance, which in full action would blend what the Deity hath eternally separated; would break down the distinctions which must, for ever, exist between that which is right, and that which is wrong. This mistaken liberality can derive, I think, no plea from its utility, and can find, I am sure, no countenance in Christianity. The Gospel requires us all to think the same things, because it teaches all the same things. We should represent its adorable Author, as weak and variable as ourselves, if we should suppose, that He equally approves those who own and adore their God in their Redeemer, and those who strip Him of His divinity and worship; those who abide by the ministry and ordinances, which He hath appointed, and those who depart from them altogether. Religion admits of no coalition between right and wrong; of no compromise between truth and error. As Christians, we are obliged to sanction the currency of those opinions only, which bear the stamp of the Almighty, and will be received at the treasury of heaven, in the day of account.

But from "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," there have been many departures. In the lapse of time since the coming of Christ, men have corrupted the truth, and multitudes are in the world, who hold not "the form of sound words^k;"

^k 2 Tim. i. 13.

many of them, doubtless, through unavoidable ignorance, and involuntary error. With what spirit are they to be considered? Are we to judge them severely, or to carry ourselves unkindly towards them? Should we, if we could, let loose the ministers of persecution, or “command fire to come down from heaven”¹ to destroy them? Ah, no. The religion of the Prince of Peace refuses the aid of passion and of force. It seeks not the salvation and happiness of men, in their misery and destruction. And they who in any age have had recourse to these means, what shall we say of them? Alas, they have not known “what manner of spirit they were of”^m! That contention for “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” which the Gospel requires of us, is not conducted acceptably to its Author, unless the law of kindness be upon our tongues, and the feelings of charity in our bosoms. But while the true Christian shrinks from a persecuting, he shrinks, also, from a prevaricating spirit. Charity can never call him one way, while truth calls him another. Indeed the highest charity he can confer on his fellow men, is to use his exertions in preserving the Gospel among them in its original purity, and promoting its blessed influences upon their hearts and lives. He abides, therefore, with zeal, by the ancient and unchangeable doctrines and institutions of the Church. He manfully avows his belief in them. He asserts with meekness, yet with firmness, their authority and importance. He concedes not, under a mistaken notion of liberality, any ground to error, nor abates any thing of the high claims of truth. Yet he wishes the salvation of all men; and when he surveys the heresies and schisms which are in the world, his love for “the faith which was once delivered unto the

¹ Luke ix. 54.

^m Ibid. ver. 55.

saints," as well as his desire that all men may find the mercy of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life, prompts, in his devotions, the ardent prayer, that it would please God, 'to bring into the way of truth, all such as have erred, and are deceived.'

But the text further suggests to us, what is the ground, upon which the doctrines of the Gospel are to be defended, that they were "*delivered* unto the saints." We are not exhorted to "contend for the faith," which reason has discovered, or philosophy devised. We are not exhorted to maintain "earnestly" the principles, which are level to our capacity, or the opinions which sagacious inquirers have formed. But we are exhorted to "contend" for the doctrines and institutions, which were originally received from God. And this, I conceive, is the proper ground, upon which all the doctrines of the Gospel are to be embraced; that they were revealed by the Almighty. It is the right employment of our understandings, to ascertain what the principles were, which the saints received, and to ascertain also, that they received them with sufficient evidence of their coming from God. This done, we are to believe them, upon the ground of the Divine veracity, and to submit our opinions and lives, entirely to their control.

But you will say, there are things in the Scriptures, for which we see no reason, and mysteries, of which we have no comprehension. Be it so. This does not at all disparage their truth. If we will assent to nothing, which we do not comprehend, we shall be unable to believe the testimony of our senses, or the consciousness of our own minds. For we have not less comprehension of any of the mysteries of religion, than we have of the manner, in which our senses convey the images of material objects to our minds, or than we have of the wonder-

ful daily miracle, whereby we retain the being which we are conscious we possess. The subjects to which the mysterious doctrines of our faith relate, we have not faculties to scan. "They are as high as heaven; what can we do? Deeper than hell; what can we know?" And as to the institutions and requirements of the Gospel, whose necessity or fitness we cannot perceive, God, surely, is not obliged to give to His creatures a reason for the mode, in which He chooses to convey to them His blessings. Whatever He has vouchsafed to reveal to us of His nature or will, we are to receive with the submissiveness of pupils, with the docility of little children. And indeed pupils we are at our best estate, who need some one to instruct us concerning the Divine nature, and our own duty and destination. We are no more than children, who have not faculties for acquiring the knowledge, nor powers for obtaining the treasures, which are essential to our everlasting peace, and whom it becomes to receive with all humility and obedience, whatever instructions our heavenly Father sees fit to give us. The mysterious doctrines of His word we are to embrace, not because we comprehend them; but because they are taught us by that Being, who is too wise to be deceived Himself, and too good to deceive His children. Our own understandings are, in matters of revelation, to be subjected to the obedience of faith; and all the imaginations of our minds, and inclinations of our wills, to be brought into captivity unto Christ.

In the remainder of this discourse, I shall apply what has been said, to a subject which has all the while been in my view; the sublime and important doctrine of the Trinity. Having in the festivals

which we have successively celebrated, from Advent to this day, set before us the distinct offices of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in our salvation, the Church, to-day, calls us around the altar of Christian faith, ‘to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine Majesty to worship the Unity.’ This mode of the existence of the Divinity, by a Trinity of Persons in one undivided essence, is, indeed, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints:” for it was exhibited in the morning of creation; it was taught to the chosen people in the names, and by the circumstances, under which Jehovah manifested Himself to them; it is illustrated to those, who have a spiritual discernment, by many striking analogies in the natural world; it is unequivocally asserted by Christ and His Apostles; and it has been the prevailing faith of the Church, in all ages of its existence. It is the most essential and important doctrine of our religion, and, therefore, we are “earnestly to contend” for it. On it depends the consistency and significance of Scripture; the greatness and sufficiency of the atonement; the lawfulness and propriety of the homage with which we honour the Son and the Spirit, “even as we honour the Father^o;” the fullness of the Christian’s comfort and confidence; and his happy assurance, that his Lord is adequate to the supply of all his necessities, and “able,” by His mighty power, “to subdue all things unto Himself^p.” The ground on which it is to be believed is, that it is taught us in the revelations of God. To comprehend, or explain, this mysterious existence of three Persons in one God, is utterly beyond our power. Nor should this, in any degree, surprise us. Our minds would be infinite, if we were ca-

^o John v. 23.

^p Phil. iii. 21.

pable of apprehending fully the mode of existence of an Infinite Being. He alone is capable of informing us concerning it, by whom alone it is comprehensible. For our instruction and comfort, He has graciously manifested Himself to us under the characters, in which He eternally exists; and draws us to Him by each of these characters, as the Father devising, the Son purchasing, and the Holy Ghost applying that merciful redemption, by which we are saved from our sins, and begotten again to the inheritance of eternal life. And “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” What are thy powers, that thou shouldest scrutinize the account, which thy Creator hath given of His own existence? Go, say of the pebble under thy feet, by what mysterious power its parts cohere! Go tell of the colours which refresh thy sight, how they exist in the tulip, and in the bow; and by what mysterious connection they are imaged by thy eye to thy mind! Go, say of that reason, in which thou vainly boastest, how it exists in conjunction with thy body, and actuates thy will! Not till thou canst guess aright concerning the things that are upon the earth, can it become thee to cavil at the revelations of God. Betake thee rather to the Father, through the mediation of the Son, by the power of the Holy Ghost: and beseech the Eternal God to give thee grace, to confess the true faith, and to keep thee stedfast in this faith evermore.

My brethren, in this age of innovation, when human reason exalteth itself as the standard of all truth, many are found, who depart from “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints;” and by stripping Him of His Divinity, do in effect “deny the Lord that bought them^r.” At such a time, it is

^s Rom. ix. 20.

^r 2 Pet. ii. 1.

peculiarly incumbent upon you, whose lot God has graciously cast in a Church, in which “the form of sound words” is and ever has been preserved, to assert zealously, and maintain inviolably this ancient article of our holy faith. Listen not to their language, and peruse not their works, who, under a show of philosophy and superior reason, would carry you away from this fundamental doctrine. Teach your children, and your children’s children the existence of the three gracious Persons in the “one” only “living and true God;” and accustom them to render the due and appropriate homage to each of the names, into which they were baptized.

• 2 Tim. i. 13.

SERMON LVI.

—◆—
ON TRINITY SUNDAY.
—◆—

I ST. JOHN V. 7.

There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.

IT is a peculiar excellency of our Church, that, while she preserves in purity the morality, she is not negligent of the doctrines of Christianity. By the perfection of her arrangements, all the grand doctrinal truths of the Gospel, are, in the course of the year, presented to her sons for special contemplation. By this means she secures from neglect or perversion those points of faith, which are the essentials of our religion, and at the same time renders unnecessary those frequent disputations upon doctrinal subjects, which do not make men either wiser or better. Having lately exhibited to us the mercy and holiness of God, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Ghost to abide with Christians, she, to-day, calls us to collect our thoughts and contemplate that mystery of revelation, the holy and eternal Trinity. A subject this solemnly sublime; and offered to finite minds, as a matter for belief, not comprehension. Every endeavour, with merely human faculties, to comprehend this mystery, must prove futile; for

“ can we by searching find out God? can we find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what can we do? deeper than hell; what can we know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea^a.” The business of the Christian to-day is, not to indulge in human speculations; not to be beguiled by the pride of human reason; but to recur with humility to that fountain, which the Deity has set open for his instruction, and to draw thence the truth, with which the Church now requires him to refresh his memory. Impressed with these sentiments, I have selected as a guide to your thoughts, the plain and explicit declaration of St. John, which was read at the opening of this discourse: “ There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

In discoursing from these words, I shall endeavour to show;

First, that the Godhead is one:

Secondly, that in this Unity of the Godhead, there is a Trinity of Persons; and

Thirdly, that the Persons of the Trinity are co-equal and co-existent.

The illustration of these several points will be adduced, almost wholly, from Scripture; for I aver, that such is this mystery, as to leave it altogether improbable, perhaps impossible, that it should have been devised by the human mind; and that, therefore, we indulge our vanity, and our aversion to spiritual truth, when we look for the circumstances of it; elsewhere than in the records of divine revelation.

This premised, I proceed to show, in the first place, that the Godhead is *one*. The unity of the

^a Job xi. 7—9.

Divine essence is, throughout the sacred volume, made the fundamental article of true religion. It is probable that information upon this point was communicated to man, when, in a state of innocence, he conversed with his God; and that it descended by tradition to after generations, till it was lost in the commixture of human corruptions. So consensual is it with pure reason; so essential to the rational idea of a supreme cause, that we find it separated from the crude mass of polytheism by the most enlightened heathen sages, who possessed as clear perceptions of it, as could be expected among nations, whose gods were as numerous as the whims of fancy, and who were idolatrous by institution. When the Deity, that He might revive and preserve among men a knowledge of Himself, gave to the Jews the Old Testament revelation, He founded their temple, their rites, and their obedience upon the truth, "The Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him^b." "The Lord our God is one Lord^c." The universal language of the Old Testament is, "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside Me there is no God^d." When in the fulness of time the whole counsel of the Most High was manifested by Jesus Christ, mankind were taught that eternal life depended upon knowing the "only true God^e." The acknowledgment of the Redeemer is not more essential to Christianity, than a belief in one Supreme Creator of all things, and Governor of the universe, the true and incomprehensible God. "We have one Father, even God^f." "To us there is but one God^g." "There is none good but one, that is, God^h." So that, whether we consult with reason, with the historians and prophets

^b Deut. iv. 35.^c Ibid. vi. 4.^d Is. xlv. 6.^e John xvii. 3.^f Ibid. viii. 41.^g 1 Cor. viii. 6.^h Matt. xix. 17.

of the Old Testament, with Christ Himself, or with the writers of the Gospel, we shall be taught the unity of the Deity.

I now proceed to show, secondly, that in this unity of the Godhead, there is a Trinity of Persons. Unable to comprehend perfectly the nature of Deity, man of himself can predicate nothing concerning the mode of His existence. All knowledge upon this point must come from the oracles of truth; and they abundantly substantiate the present position. My text, in as plain words as can be written or spoken, declares, that three divers Persons in heaven were active in and about the redemption of man; and that these three existed in the unity of the Godhead. "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." I know, that the authenticity of this passage has been disputed, and that the foes of the orthodox faith have parried it, by calling it an interpolation. The objection evinces the difficulty of clothing the passage with any other construction, than that which has been given, and thus secures it from that perversion, which, *to accommodate human reason*, or rather *human ignorance*, many passages of the New Testament have been made to endure. Admitting, however, that the authenticity of this passage is not certain, our position does not depend upon this one passage of sacred writ for support. At the baptism of Christ, the Scripture history exhibits to us the Holy Three severally engaged; the Son receiving this sacrament, the Spirit descending upon Him, and the Father proclaiming His characterⁱ. The Apostles wish to their brethren, the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit^k. Our Saviour Himself when

ⁱ Matt. iii. 16, 17.

^k 2 Cor. xiii. 14, &c.

commissioning His ministers, commanded them to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost¹.” To adduce no more of the texts, which every where abound in the Gospel, to wave the traces of this truth in the writings of some heathens, and in many of the acts, titles, and adorations of the Supreme Being under the Jewish dispensation, and to avoid mentioning the conjectures of wise and good men, concerning the symbolic representation of the Trinity in every created object: let me ask, what the opponents of the doctrine will do with the passages above quoted? Will they make these vital parts of the Gospel interpolations? No. They prefer giving to them a sense of their own. Instead of humbly following the direct, and literal signification of Scripture, upon a subject infinitely above their comprehension, they have warped and bent the word of God to their own conceptions, till some with Arius have “denied the Lord that bought them^m,” reducing Christ to a mere creature; others with Sabellius have rendered the conduct of Jesus, and the institutes of His religion ridiculous, by supposing them to have commanded Christians to be baptized and blessed, first, in the name of the Father, the one entire Deity, and then, in names appropriated not to different beings, but to energies of that same Deity; and others with Socinus make the Redeemer of our souls, a mere human being. These schemes, and the various branches of Unitarianism, diverging from each of them, are not the result of a candid reading of the Scriptures; but of finite speculations concerning the secrets of Heaven, and foolish endeavours of men to measure the mysteries of revelation by their narrow capacities. Whoever will read the Bible, with

¹ Matt. xxviii. 19.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 1.

an honest intent to ascertain its doctrine upon this point, will find all the parts of it concurrent with the declaration in my text, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost."

I hasten now to show, thirdly, that the Persons of the Holy and ever Blessed Trinity are co-equal and co-existent. This is implied in the last clause of the text, "these three are one." No one can need to be informed, that the Father is fully, and essentially God over all blessed for evermore. Now, if it can be proved from Scripture, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God, it will clearly follow, that the Holy Three are co-equal and co-existent. The Deity is designated in Scripture by titles appropriated to Him; by honours due to Him; and by attributes which can be predicated of none but the Supreme Being. He, therefore, to whom these titles, honours, and attributes are assigned, must be God. Each and every of them are, in numberless passages of the sacred writings, given both to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As my time has almost elapsed, a few texts establishing the divinity of each shall be adduced, and recollection, or your Bibles will furnish you with a variety of others. First of the Son. It was lately shown to be an essential article of Christianity, that Christ should judge the world. St. Paul speaking of this judgment, has this remarkable passage, "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ: for it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Here the Apostle expressly makes Christ God, and it is observable, that he alludes to a passage in Isaiah, in

which these very words are represented as coming from Jehovah^o, a name so solemnly appropriated to the Most High, that the Jews never pronounced it. St. John declares the Logos, or Word, to be God, and to have been the Creator of all things which were made^p. The same Apostle, in the chapter from which the text is selected, styles Jesus Christ, “the true God^q.” In St. Jude, He is called, “the only wise God^r.” In the epistle to the Romans, He is said to be “over all, God blessed for ever^s.” The Redeemer of Israel, the Saviour, the Messiah, is called by the prophets “King of kings, and Lord of lords;” “the first and the last^t;” and in the New Testament, with allusion to these expressions, the same titles of Divinity are given to Christ^u. Divine worship was ordered by the Father Himself to be offered to the Son: “Let all the angels of God worship Him^v.” He received adoration from His disciples when present, and the primitive Christians worshipped Him as God. In a word, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Eternity, Infinite Goodness, all the attributes which can be inherent in God alone, are declared to be in Christ, in such express terms, as to admit of no equivocation, and such numerous passages, as to render a selection unnecessary. From all which it appears, that Jesus Christ was true, and very God. It is objected, that He sometimes speaks of Himself as inferior to the Father. He does so^w. But whenever He does, the critical observer will find, He speaks in His human capacity, viewing Himself as Man.

Let me have your patience a few moments longer, while I adduce some Scripture evidences that the

^o Is. xlv. 23.

^p John i. 1--3.

^q 1 John v. 20.

^r Jude, 25.

^s Rom. ix. 5.

^t Is. xlv. 6.

^u Rev. i. 11, 17.; xvii. 14.; xix. 16.

^v Heb. i. 6.

^w John xiv. 23.

Holy Ghost is God. Jehovah, in Isaiah, commands the prophet to go to the people, and utter certain words, and St. Paul speaks of the same commission as given to Esaias, by the Holy Ghost^z. Jeremiah represents Jehovah as resolving to make a new covenant with Israel, and in the epistle to the Hebrews this resolution is attributed to the Holy Ghost^a, as though the names were synonymous. The Apostle St. Peter condemned Ananias for lying to the Holy Ghost; and immediately, to show the heinousness of the offence, tells him he had “lied unto God^b.” In both the epistles to the Corinthians, Christians are styled the temples of God, because the Spirit of God dwells in them^c. The Holy Spirit is said to have been active in the creation; to have “moved upon the face of the waters^d”; to have “garnished the heavens^e,” and to have given life to man^f. As well as the Father and the Son, He received Divine honours. All the attributes of the Divine Essence are spoken of as belonging to the Holy Ghost. He is Omniscient, for He “searcheth all things^g,” “guideth into all truth^h,” and is “the Spirit of wisdom and revelationⁱ.” He is Omnipresent, for God is said to dwell in us by His Spirit^k, and the Psalmist inquires, whither he should go from the Holy Spirit^l. He is Eternal. “All these,” says St. Paul, “worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every one severally as He will^m.” He is Eternal. He existed before the worlds, and abideth for ever. In short, the Scriptures attribute all the insignia to the Holy Ghost, by which the Supreme God is ever, and alone, distinguished. Thus it is evident,

^z Is. vi. 9.; Acts xxviii. 26. ^a Jer. xxxi. 31.; Heb. viii. 8.

^b Acts v. 4. ^c 1 Cor. iii. 16.; 2 Cor. vi. 16. ^d Gen. i. 2.

^e Job. xxvi. 13. ^f Ibid. xxxiii. 4. ^g 1 Cor. ii. 10.

^h John xvi. 13. ⁱ Eph. i. 17. ^k Rom. viii. 11.

^l Psalm cxxxix. 7.

^m 1 Cor. xii. 11.

that 'such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost:' and, consequently, that the Persons of the Holy Trinity are co-equal and co-existent.

That the texts which have been adduced are not corruptions, is evident from a comparison of the various versions of the New Testament which exist. That they are not misunderstood, is morally certain, from their being thus construed by all the primitive Christians, even those who had conversed with the Apostles, and from their being always thus explained by the Church, till the human mind was made the test of divine truths.

We have now seen that the Divine Essence, or the Godhead, is One; that in this Unity of Essence, there is a Trinity of Persons, and that these Persons are co-equal, each being 'very God.' This is the doctrine of the Bible. This is the doctrine held undisturbed by the Church for the first three centuries, from the establishment of Christianity. The enemies of the Catholic faith evince, by their contradictions, its foundation in the Gospel: for Sabellius and Socinus were so convinced of the divinity of the Spirit, that they made Him the same Person with the Father; and Arius, and Macedonius were so satisfied with the distinction of the Persons of the Three, that they considered the Word and Spirit as mere creatures. Had it not been for the pride of man's heart, for his desire to unvail the secrets of Heaven, and to measure divine truths by finite faculties; this great mystery of our religion might have escaped the attack of its foes, and resting upon the evidences which prove the authenticity of our religion, might have commanded the humble belief of every disciple of Christ. It is, perhaps, an unpleasant feature of modern divinity, that the prevalent desire of simplifying Christianity has given birth to many, who

would cut this mystery because they cannot solve it ; and as the Bishop of Connecticut * has expressed it, ‘ take from their Redeemer His eternal power and Godhead.’ Let us, my friends, learn from what has been said to “ hold fast the form of sound words,” and “ the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” That we cannot conceive, how the Three are one substance, and yet distinct Persons, should not shake our faith ; for we are equally as unable to conceive, how the soul, mind, and body constitute one man ; or how natural causes produce their consequences, or even how we think, believe, or reject. Convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of the Bible, we should not listen to “ vain babblings^p,” but the language of our hearts should be, “ yea, let God be true, but every man a liar^q.”

Now to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever.

ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 13.

[•] Jude, 3.

^p 1 Tim. vi. 20.

^q Rom. iii. 4.

* Bishop Seabury.

SERMON LVII.

ON THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

HEBREWS, i. 14.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation?

WE have just risen, my brethren, from acknowledging before God, that He hath 'constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order.' And, indeed, it is worthy of praise, in the economy of our Church, that while she celebrates, regularly, the mysteries of our religion, and commemorates the actions and characters of the Apostles and distinguished disciples of our Lord, she reminds us annually of our connection with the higher orders of intelligences, and leads us to contemplate whatever the Scriptures have revealed, concerning *the angels of God*. On this festal day, which happily combines the joys of the Sabbath with the pleasures which may spring from contemplating what knowledge we have of these heavenly hosts, we shall make *them* the theme of our discourse; endeavouring to show you:

In the first place, that these exalted beings, denominated Angels, do exist:

Secondly, that they take an interest, and have an influence, in the affairs of this visible world: and,

Thirdly, that the doctrine concerning them affords many inferences, conducive to our comfort and religious improvement.

That there are higher orders of intelligent beings than man, has been with common consent believed in all ages. The Demons of the ancients, a name which they used in a good, as well as bad sense, were many of them supposed never to have inhabited material bodies; and answer exactly to the powers of heaven, which by us are styled Angels. The very name Angel does sometimes occur in ancient heathen writings; and the beings whom it designates, are known to the oldest Poets, and introduced into the discourses of almost all the Philosophers. Plato styles them ‘reporters and carriers from men to the gods, and from the gods to men:’ and Apuleius has this remarkable expression, ‘all things are done by the will, power, and authority of the gods, but, withal, by the service and ministry of the Demons,’ or Angels. These notions are the common notions of mankind, found among them in every age, more or less definite, according to their situation and means of refinement.

And, indeed, when we consider the vast extent of the universe; when we observe the splendid, and richly furnished parts of it, which we behold above us; and on imagination’s wings pass the limits of sense, and contemplate the unbounded space, over which the everlasting God presides; it can hardly seem probable, that this little globe, this spot which we inhabit, is the only part of His great domain, which He has seen fit to people. Below us, we see a beautiful gradation of creatures from that, in which solitary sensation first awakes, to a being who thinks, and reasons, and knows his God. That this thinking being, man, is the most perfect intellectual creature in the universe; that there is a vast, an awful

chasm between him and the great Creator, improved reason does not readily admit. Analogy suggests, and the suggestion comports much more easily with our ideas of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, that man is the link, which connects the material with the intellectual world; and that there are above us gradations of beings, equally regular, and infinitely more grand than those, which we behold below us.

It must, however, be confessed, that these deductions are not obvious to the capacities of the mass of mankind. Their common consent upon a subject, not cognizable without a miracle, by their senses, has, probably, been derived by tradition from revelations and manifestations made to the parents of the race, in the happy morning of the world. I am the more confirmed in this opinion by the fact, that in the Scriptures, the existence of Angels is no more made a new revelation, than the existence of God. Both are presumed to have been before understood. When the appearance of an Angel is first mentioned in the sacred volume, no preparatory information is given concerning him. The reader is not supposed to be surprised; nor does the writer appear to apprehend any necessity of explaining his nature or office. He is mentioned, as one of an order of beings, with whose existence mankind were already acquainted. It is, therefore, highly probable, that this was among the communications, which the Almighty made to man in the earliest stage of the world; and that, like many other communications, it was both preserved and corrupted by passing through the polluted channels of tradition, among the successive generations of men.

But be this as it may, in us who possess the holy records of truth, there can be no doubt of the existence of angelic beings. "The host of heaven."

and “the angels of God” are spoken of in every part of Scripture^a. We are taught that they are numerous, for we read of “an innumerable company of Angels^b,” of “legions^c,” that might be dispatched to the service of Christ; and of the holy myriads of their hosts^d. In the order of nature, they are superior to man; for he is said to be made “lower than the Angels^e.” They are eminently wise, and good, and incapable of decay; for he, who has much wisdom or goodness, and they who shall die no more, are compared, in the language of inspiration, to “the angels which are in heaven^f.” They are endowed with superior force and vigour, for they are styled “mighty^g,” and “swift^h” angels; and the Psalmist extols them as “excelling in strengthⁱ.” We may believe that they are of different ranks, and that in every rank there are subordinations; for we hear of “Michael, one of the chief princes^k,” of “Cherubim^l” and “Seraphim^m,” of “Angels” and “Archangelsⁿ,” of “thrones and dominions; principalities and powers^o,” and of “seven” distinguished “spirits of God^p.” They are accountable beings; for those “which kept not their first estate,” are “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day^q.” In their office, the Angels wait upon the Almighty. Wherever He holds His court, they attend Him; constituting His august retinue, His magnificent train. Chosen bands of them surround Him, displaying His glory, whenever He vouchsafes to give a visible manifestation of His presence. In the high and

^a 1 Kings xxii. 19; John i. 51, &c.

^e Matt. xxvi. 53. ^d Dan. vii. 10.

^f Mark xii. 25; Luke xx. 36.

^b Dan. ix. 21.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 20.

^l Gen. iii. 24.

^m 1 Thess. iv. 16.

^o Col. i. 16.

^p Rev. iii. 1.

^b Heb. xii. 22.

^c Ps. viii. 5.

^g 2 Thess. i. 7.

^h Dan. x. 13.

ⁿ Is. vi. 2.

^q Jude 6.

lofty abode, in which He everlastingly dwells; “thousand thousands” of them “minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him.”

We see, then, from tradition, from the reasonableness of the thing, and from what the Scriptures contain, the certainty of the existence of Angels. It becomes now an interesting enquiry, whether these exalted beings have any knowledge of what is transacted on our earth; or take any interest in the affairs of men. And, perhaps, we shall be surprised to find, how great concern the Angels of God have with this terrestrial world.

That they know and observe, what is done among men, is indisputable. St. Paul says, expressly, that “we are made a spectacle unto angels^s,” and we are taught, that “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God^t.”

But they not only know, they take a lively interest in, whatever is done in this sublunary part of their Maker’s dominion. In that memorable commencement of a new epoch in the universe, when the corner stone of this earth was laid, and the creation of its inhabitants accomplished, “the morning stars,” the hosts of heaven, “sang together, and all the sons of God,” the elder offspring of the Most High, “shouted for joy^u.” These pure and benevolent spirits rejoiced in the creation of our world, which would enlarge the theatre of the Almighty’s glory, and multiply the beings, who would taste His beneficence, and adore His name. When, therefore, the earth came from His hands, and its inhabitants were formed, and pronounced good, their

^r Dan. vii. 10.

^s Eph. iii. 10.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^u Job xxxviii. 7.

voices resounded through the arches of heaven, celebrating the creature's happiness, and the Creator's praise.

There has been another memorable occasion, on which the Angels manifested the lively interest, which they take in the affairs of men. It was at the incarnation of the Son of God. This was, indeed, the commencement of a new creation. A race of intelligent beings, who had fallen, were now to be ransomed from destruction. The foundation was now laid of "new heavens and a new earth^x," in which would finally dwell righteousness, and all its concomitant bliss. When, therefore, our Saviour was born, an Angel rejoiced to be the herald of the news to the sons of men; "and a multitude of the heavenly host^y" obtained permission to accompany him on the delightful errand. Scarcely had the messenger delivered his tidings of joy, when there burst from the bosoms of these exalted spirits an anthem, which echoed through the temple not made with hands, bearing glory to the Author of this great salvation, and gratulations to the objects of it. It is not, however, on these great occasions only, that the Angels have been interested in sublunary events. They are always made glad by the happiness of any of the offspring of their King, and by the accomplishment of His will in any part of His kingdom. Into the gracious scheme, devised for the recovery of our race, they with affectionate concern "desire to look^z;" and, whenever it is successful in reclaiming an unhappy wanderer from the error of his ways, "to the wisdom of the just^a;" they feel the joy, rejoicing, we are told, in the presence of God, "over one sinner that repenteth^b."

^x 2 Pet. iii. 13.

^y Luke ii. 13.

^z 1 Pet. i. 12.

^a Luke i. 17.

^b Ibid. xv. 7.

But, I have to observe further, that as the Angels do know, and take an interest in the affairs of our world, so they have a considerable care and influence over it. Not that the Almighty needs that aid. He is able by His own inherent power, to accomplish with a word all the purposes of His will. But, in His wisdom, he sees fit to employ the creatures He has made; partly, no doubt, that they may adorn the creation by doing Him service, and be capable of the pleasures and rewards of fidelity. Accordingly, the Angels are often made the instruments of His providence; and have their offices towards the human race. This was impressively revealed to the sorrowful Patriarch at Bethel, in that wonderful vision which was there vouchsafed to him, of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with “the Angels of God ascending and descending upon it.” The wandering Jacob learnt from it, what every wandering pilgrim upon earth may learn, that these hosts of God are constantly employed, in the protection and service of His faithful creatures. I shall pass over the opinion, entertained by the Jews, and current, sometimes in a disguised form, among the heathens, that every nation is the peculiar province of some tutelary Angel. Nor shall I dwell upon the sentiment, which the opinion of Socrates has conspired with the feelings of men, to render striking and interesting, that every individual is the charge of some particular spirit, who is the guardian of his conduct and fortunes. Upon these points, I apprehend, men must be left to their own judgments; since revelation furnishes no absolute, unequivocal instructions concerning them. What I am chiefly anxious to state, and my text presses upon your observation, is, that good men have the regard

and services of the Angels of heaven. Upon this subject, the Scriptures are explicit. The hosts of God are beautifully represented in them, as encamping around the dwellings of the just^d. The Almighty is said to “give His Angels charge over” the upright, “to keep them in all their ways^e.” And, if we need a declaration plainer than these, we have one, in the words which I have placed at the head of this discourse, as unequivocal as language can express, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

The way, in which these holy spirits extend their services to men, is generally imperceptible. They did, indeed, visibly withstand the perverseness of Balaam. They did sensibly protect Lot, and reward his purity and piety. And in the days of His temptation, and of His agony, they were sent to “minister” unto Christ^f. But generally, and for very apparent reasons, their succour and defence is not obvious to the senses. We know not, how many of our spiritual enemies they may oppose and vanquish. We are ignorant, from how many unseen dangers they may preserve us. But this we are assured, that the sincere disciples of Jesus, however low and obscure their lot, are constantly the charge of Angels, “who behold the face of His Father which is in heaven^g.” Hence we may infer, that they render them many and great services. The Almighty “rides upon the Cherubim^h” to their help. He maketh the Angels His chariots, when He visits them with His mercies. It is probable, that in the final scene of this probationary life, when the souls of men need all the support, which heaven and earth

^d Ps. xxxiv. 7. ^e Ibid. xci. 11. ^f Matt. iv. 11.; Luke xxii. 43.

^g Matt. xviii. 10.

^h Ps. xviii. 10.

can give, that these blessed ministers of light redouble their sympathy and succour. We may gather from one of the parables of our Lord, that they wait about the death beds of the just, to conduct the departing spirit “to Abraham’s bosomⁱ :” and from what is recorded by St. Judé, of the care of Michael over “the body of Moses^k,” we may safely suppose, that even that dust of the righteous is not viewed by them with indifference, which through the promises of the Almighty rests in hope. These spirits, we know, will be active agents in the morning of the resurrection. When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, His holy angels will come with Him. He will send them “to gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven^l.” They are the reapers, who, in the time of the harvest, will separate the chaff from the wheat; and gather the latter into the garner of God.

Such is the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning Angels. But it may be asked, Of what use is this doctrine to us? I answer; of very great use. It affords many inferences, highly conducive to our comfort, and religious improvement.

For, in the first place, it extends our knowledge of the greatness of our God. Consider, that these myriads of exalted intelligences derive their being from Him. He “callesh them all by their names^m.” They are daily upheld in existence by His power. They are all under his control; subservient to His will; ready in all parts of His universe to “do His pleasureⁿ.” How great is He who made, sustains, and rules them all! Verily, when we return from our contemplation of this part of His dominion to

ⁱ Luke xvi. 22.^k Jude, 9.^l Mark xiii. 27.^m Ps. cxlvii. 4.ⁿ Ibid. ciii. 21.

our own little earth, and survey what is done visibly beneath the sun, we may exclaim with Job, “ Lo, these are parts of His ways : but how little a portion is heard of Him ° !”

Again. The subject we have contemplated, may increase our admiration of the goodness of God. What infinite benevolence is that, which, for the diffusion of happiness, has so multiplied the orders of being ! How incalculably great is the sum of bliss, which, flowing perpetually from the Deity’s right hand, causes these countless hosts of exalted creatures to rejoice in the existence, which they have received of the Most High ! And how great is His mercy and goodness to us men, that He hath given His Angels charge over us ; that He hath sent forth these great and glorious spirits to minister unto us. “ Bless the Lord, O our souls : and all that is within us, bless His holy name !”

Further. This doctrine we have been considering, furnishes a powerful inducement to integrity, purity, and circumspection in all the walks, and all the acts of life. What greater restraint can we have upon our conduct, than the knowledge of the presence and observation of these ministers of heaven ? Thou, who art quiet in thy sins ; thou who wrappest about thee the mantle of secrecy, and under it art guilty of falsehood and fraud : thou who rejoicest in the darkness of night, and givest thyself to the indulgence of thy lusts, to the perpetration of thy crimes ; consider, how great, and how many, are the spectators of thy iniquity. What witnesses are these, which the Almighty will produce in the awful day of judgment, not only of thy “ presumptuous sins,” but of thy most “ secret faults !” In the persons of His Angels, as well as

° Job xxvi. 14.

° Ps. ciii. 1.

¶ Ps. xix. 13.

¶ Ibid. ver. 12.

in His own Omnipresence, “ He is about thy path and about thy bed, and spieth out all thy ways^s.” And if thou wouldest not be put to confusion and shame, when the inhabitants of heaven and earth shall be present at thy judgment, be pure, be honest, be circumspect in thy whole demeanour. Let the Angels have nothing to testify concerning thee, but good deeds done without ostentation, and virtues, cherished in the most private recesses, as well as in the more open walks, of thy life.

Once more. Our subject affords a powerful encouragement to the heirs of salvation. Arduous is the conflict, in which the Christian is engaged. “ We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places^t.” But for our encouragement we are informed, that Michael and his Angels have overcome the dragon and his angels^u. When our Lord had long resisted the temptations of the adversary, behold, these blessed spirits “ came and ministered unto Him^x.” And in the affecting scene in the garden, at the tremendous hour of the power of darkness, when the “ agony” of Christ had risen to the highest pitch of human distress, there appeared unto Him “ an Angel from heaven strengthening Him^y.” These things were done for our instruction. Whether we contemplate the forces, or the personal excellence of the “ Captain of our salvation^z,” we may animate our souls with the persuasion, that greater is He who is with us, than they who are against us. The angels are enlisted on the side of the Church. Let us hold them fast,

^s Ps. cxxxix. 2.

^u Rev. xii. 7, 8.

^y Luke xxii. 43.

^t Eph. vi. 12.

^x Matt. iv. 11.

^z Heb. ii. 10.

by the strength which we have in Christ Jesus; and they will not go, until they bless us^a.

Finally. I would adduce from what has been said, a special motive to sincerity and reverence in our religious worship. It has already been observed to you, that wherever the Deity is particularly present, it is with the retinue of His Angels. This was eminently the case in the Jewish temple. And the Gospel favours the opinion, that it is so in the places of Christian worship, in which God receives the homage of His redeemed creatures. In the earliest ages of the Church, before man had exalted himself above all created intelligents, this sentiment was carefully cherished. ‘Hear thou me,’ says one of the most eloquent of the fathers, ‘hear thou me, and know, that Angels are every where; and that chiefly in the house of God they attend upon their King.’ ‘Doubt not,’ says another of these primitive disciples of our Lord, ‘that an Angel is present when Christ is offered.’ And again, says the holy Chrysostom, ‘When the Eucharist is celebrated, the angels stand by the priest, and the whole quire resounds with celestial powers, and the place about the altar is filled with them, in honour of Him, who is laid thereon.’ What sobriety should these considerations beget in us, when we come into God’s house! How powerfully do they enforce that decency in worship, which the Apostle recommends “because of the Angels^b!” Especially, with what pure hearts and clean hands, with what reverence and godly fear, should we come to the holy table! Consider with whom you there stand; who are the spectators of your conduct; yea, who are the associates of your devotion, when you ‘laud and mag-

^a Gen. xxxii. 26.

^b 1 Cor. xi. 10.

nify God's glorious name!' This will not fail to inspire you with reverence. It will enable you to serve God acceptably, at His altar, in His house, and throughout your lives: you will secure the succour of the heavenly hosts in the hour of danger and distress: and they will guide the horses of heaven, when they come to translate your spirits to the regions of bliss.

SERMON LVIII.

ON THE FESTIVAL OF ALL SAINTS.

REVELATIONS vii. 9, 13—18.

After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.—And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

HEAVEN, and the occupations of those who have passed the boundaries of our sight, and entered upon its glorious scenes, are objects in the highest degree interesting to the contemplative mind. Thither have gone the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs, whose instructions we value, and whose memories we revere. There rest, we trust, the spirits of the Christian friends, whom we shall see here no more. Thither ascended the Great Benefactor, whose merits

and favour are our choicest treasure. And there we expect, when this vain world shall vanish, to find the consummation of our faith and hopes, our virtue and joy. On these accounts, the region and employments of the blest will generally excite in the serious a lively curiosity. If it be chastened with a sense of the feebleness of our powers, and a submission to the wisdom of God, this curiosity is laudable; and when we think of the worthy characters who are gone from this state, can hardly be suppressed.

As the festival of All Saints, which recalls our attention to the labours and rewards of the departed servants of the Most High, coincides, to-day, with the Sabbath, we may, with peculiar propriety, make it the object of the present discourse. Upon this sublime subject, I know no better guide for your meditations, than that vision of the Church triumphant of which the text is a conspicuous part. It will furnish us with as just ideas of the situation and blessedness of the Saints, as our finite and encumbered minds can receive, and will lead to reflections adapted to the season, and to the circumstances of many of my hearers.

And, in the first place, it is pleasing to observe, that the Saints are “a great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” Every benevolent mind, which has any concern for the welfare of mankind, any gratitude to their Redeemer, and any just conception of the glory that shall be revealed, must be ardently desirous that the partakers of the heavenly gift should not be few in number. The good man puts up no prayer more earnest and sincere, than ‘that it may please God to have mercy upon all men.’ To know how many shall have mansions in the Father’s house, is not however permitted us. We are taught by the reply

which Christ once made to the inquiry, that it is not our present business. The way is clearly defined, in which we may secure to ourselves the happiness of being of the number: and to rejoice our philanthropy, and delight us with the triumphs of our Lord, we are assured that His redemption shall not be an unfruitful work, but that, through it, there shall be many sons brought into glory. In their high state of bliss, the Saints want not the refined pleasure of having many to enjoy with them their delightful existence. The worthy of every past age are collected into their 'goodly company.' The faithful of every future generation shall swell their numbers and their joy. For St. John, in his vision, "beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb." And a greater than John, even the Lamb Himself, has assured us that "they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God^a."

In unfolding the scenes of heavenly vision, the sacred writers are obliged, by the poverty of human language, and the confined state of our minds, to borrow analogies from this visible world, and represent things which surpass our comprehension, by those things with which we are familiarly acquainted. Hence, the introduction of the sublime and interesting scenery, which charms our minds, as we pass from the number of the Saints to the description, which the Evangelist has given us, of their condition. They stand "before the throne," and "before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." White is the emblem of innocence. Spotless purity enters into the very idea of it. And, by

^a Luke xiii. 29.

association, the spirits that are arrayed in perfect righteousness, and celestial glory, are beautifully imagined to be clothed with garments of white. Of such lustrous perfection our nature is destitute. Its best robes are sullied and torn. Unfit they would be for man to wear in the pure presence, and august court of the Most High. But the ransomed of the Lord are clothed in His righteousness. They “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Their spirits are made perfect. They have exchanged a nature feeble in its best services, and defiled with many frailties and sins, for a nature which vice cannot approach, nor infirmity disgrace; which, like its Author, is glorious in holiness, and divinely happy in the consciousness of its glory. With their improved being, the honours of triumphant virtue are also theirs. In this world, the faithful servants of God have often arduous and perilous conflicts. Some have “resisted unto blood, striving against sin^b,” and have sealed the value of a good conscience, by sacrificing their lives in defence of the truth. Many have struggled hard with temptation, with adversity, with the injustice, perverseness, and ingratitude of an evil world. But sorrows break down the hearts of others. All encounter dismayed foes in the king of terrors, and his numerous emissaries. But their reward is with the Lord. When the conflict ends, and their course is finished, they reap the fruit of their toil. They are acknowledged victorious, and rejoice in the recompense of their fidelity, in the presence of the celestial world. They now share the triumphs of their Master. The token, long consecrated to victory, is given them for ever. While they walk “in white robes,” they have “palms in their hands.”

^b Heb. xii. 4.

What a view does this description afford us, of the condition of the Saints in their exaltation. Ye, who have tasted the pleasures which spring from the consciousness of virtue, and know the vexations of a frail nature, imagine the bliss of their complacency in being divested of every moral debility, and clad in a pure and immutable righteousness. Ye, who have known the conflicts of virtue in the day of trial, and can estimate by your fears the precious value of safety, judge ye, with what rapture they felicitate themselves and each other, on their escape from death, and the contagion of this world, the triumphs of their integrity, and their security from any future hazard of their reward. They are happy, in the review of the dangers they have past. They rejoice in the robes with which they are clothed, and in the palms, which they have in their hands. For the former qualifies them for the presence and service of the King of heaven, and the latter are the emblems of their eternal victory over temptation and affliction, persecution and death.

This leads us to a more particular notice of the situation and employment, to which the faithful, who have quitted this earthly residence, are advanced. And here, what a flood of glory, from the station they occupy, overwhelms the astonished mind. They are “before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” To give us an impressive idea of their admission to His loftiest abode, and of the ease and freedom with which they sustain His glorious presence, they are represented as living before His throne. It is that throne, from which He observes the conduct of all creatures; yet are they not dismayed, but filled with love. It is that throne, on which He lightens with His arm, and thunders with His

voice, and displays the terribleness of His judgments. But the terror of these attributes is softened to them by the intervention of “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne,” and, amidst the awful grandeur of the scene, they peacefully admire and adore. To teach us the purity, and holiness of the region and occupations, to which they are exalted, His temple is named as the place, in which they constantly serve Him. It is that temple, in which His immediate presence rests for ever, and where ‘the angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven,’ render Him their homage, and receive His commands. In what part of the wide unknown, this resort of the blessed lies, it is unnecessary for us to know. We are much more instructed by the assurance, that “He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” Wherever He abides, there is a throne; His presence makes a temple. As an affectionate father, God is among His Saints, directing their affairs, supplying their wants, receiving their homage, and repaying it with His smiles. They live in the light of His countenance. Intimately, and unceasingly they contemplate His adorable perfections. They find a heaven in the consciousness of His favour; and the work of a heaven, in serving Him day and night,

To form an accurate sentiment of the happiness, which must arise from the vision and fruition of the Deity, is not in the power of our carnal minds. Our endeavours to follow the spirits of the just into their blessedness, in the bosom of God, are vain as the attempt to pursue the flight of the eagle towards the luminary of day. With ease we may trace his remote approaches to the lofty orb, but he is soon lost in the distance between the sun and us, or hidden in the vast effulgence of its beams. Some

faint ideas of the nature of their joy, we may, however, collect from what passes in our own bosoms. The contemplation of moral excellence, even in a finite being, excites a pure and exquisite pleasure in the virtuous mind. We love the man with a most generous affection, in whom are the amiable virtues unmixed with guile : and while we muse, admiring his worth, our own hearts glow with the spirit of his goodness. The pleasure is greater, the nearer our knowledge of his character. Our delight is unbounded, if he is our friend. How great, then, must be the felicity of contemplating with unvailed eyes, the wisdom, and beauty, and goodness of the Source of all perfection, with the assurance of His love towards us, as His selected friends.

Again. Though now we see Him not, the hope that His providence is extended over us, is life's choicest consolation. He is our final reliance. Our hearts find perfect satisfaction, no where but in Him. Wealth, fame, and pleasure fill not man's desires. On the eminences to which they raise Him, he feels a void, and is restless. But the knowledge of God, and consciousness of His favour, is a satisfactory bliss. This, even here on earth, gives peace and content to the virtuous inhabitant of life's humblest vale. How great then must be their gladness ; what can be wanting to render their satisfaction complete, who live under His immediate protection and smile, receive His actual approbation and have Him for their portion for ever ! If, at this wide distance from Him, the pious mind is soothed and sublimed by its humble devotion to the invisible God ; and by its remote communion with Him, catches, like the countenance of Moses, a gleam of His glory : what must be the composure and dignity of bosoms, how must they be changed into His glory, who dwell in the

radiance of His perfections, and worship Him face to face!

It must not escape observation, that there is nothing to interrupt, or terminate this happiness of the beatified servants of the Most High. They have no care of providing food for a perishable body, nor occasion to labour with perplexity and anguish for an unsatisfactory wealth. No weight of affliction causes their spirits to faint; no restless desires, nor impetuous passions disturb their tranquillity; no concern for the future restrains them from the enjoyment of present bliss. The tears which were here caused to flow by death's cruel ravages, or unmerited wrong, by stern adversity, or keen repentance, are wiped tenderly from every eye by the hand of God. The occasion of these griefs has no more operation. Once landed on the celestial Ararat, the terrors and the dangers of the flood are over. The scenes of sorrow and anguish, darkness and dismay, give place to brighter prospects, and enlivening sunshine. And an eternal bow about the throne assures them, that the bitterness of death is past, and God in covenant with them for their perpetual preservation.

Such is the blessedness of those happy spirits, who have departed this life, in the true faith and fear; so great is their reward in heaven. The utmost stretch of our conceptions will not reach their felicity. They are "before the throne of God."

But in this glorious condition, and exalted station, how are the spirits of the blest employed? No toil makes repose necessary, no feebleness requires it, and, therefore, no part of their existence is lost in sleep. Night and day they serve their Maker in His temple. In doing His will, in celebrating His

greatness, in admiring His works, in imitating His love, in joining with the angelic hosts to offer perpetual praises to their common Lord, they spend their existence. They have no fatiguing duty, nor unwelcome business. They are disencumbered of wants and cares. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne," is perpetually leading them to the unsatiating pleasures of His Father's house, to fountains of life, and light, and of every elevated pleasure. To receive perpetually the smiles of the Highest, is their daily business; and their chief occupation, to praise His name.

To this glorious company, my brethren, those departed friends have assuredly gone, whose Christian excellencies we remember with delight. How great, then, that happiness, upon which they entered, when we bemoaned their departure with our tears! What disregard of their interest and pleasure, to wish them back to this vain, and fluctuating scene! Let us, rather, learn to adore the goodness of the Being, who provided a way of bringing the objects of our love, to such a state of exaltation and bliss. We are wont to esteem those who esteem our friends, and feel grateful to those who merely wish them prosperity. How, then, are the bonds of our obligation to the Most High strengthened, what incense of gratitude should perpetually rise to Him from our hearts, whose goodness hath brought them, when their allotment here was ended, into the delightful inheritance of the children of God! There cannot, methinks, be a more sacred claim upon our love, or more powerful incitement to our obedience.

Again. With this august body of Saints, we, my brethren, though we sojourn on earth, are closely connected. In the mystical body of our Lord, we

have a communion with them. Their Head is ours. Their objects and their pleasures are those which we pursue. The seal of their redemption is that in which we trust; the subject which swells their celestial Hallelujahs, we celebrate in the sacramental supper. And the Being, by whom they are brought into glory, ascended also, we trust, to prepare a place for us. “Now therefore,” says the Apostle, “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God^c.” In this high connection, beloved, let us walk with becoming dignity, purity, and circumspection. Let us listen to the remonstrances against vice; let us obey the incitements to every religious and social duty; let us indulge the noble and important resolutions, which will arise in the bosom of every ingenuous person, who sincerely considers himself as related, by his Christian privileges, “to the general assembly and Church of the first born,—and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,—and to God the Judge of all^d.”

Which leads me to remark, lastly, that the glorious rewards, which the Saints possess, may also be won by our fidelity. “In our Father’s house are many mansions^e.” And is there any interest, which it so much behoves us to secure, as this? For what that this earth can proffer, and our most successful exertions obtain, shall we relinquish such inestimable and eternal bliss? Let us, rather, “give diligence to make our calling and election sure^f.” Are we beset with temptations? Does the Most High seem to frown on us in sore chastisement? Is the “spirit willing, but the flesh weak^g?” Be not

^c Eph. ii. 19.

^d Heb. xii. 23, 24.

^e John xiv. 2.

^f 2 Pet. i. 10.

^g Matt. xxvi. 41.

dismayed. In like manner were the Saints tried, who have conquered and are crowned. Let us take their lives for our ensamples, and in the uniform use of the means of grace, with eyes fixed on the hopes of glory, pursue the path in which they journeyed, “ who through faith and patience inherit the promises^h.”

^h Heb. vi. 12.

SERMON LIX.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS, ix. 19—21.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name?

AMONG the characters which the Gospel history presents to us, St. Paul holds a conspicuous place. Perhaps, to none of the Apostles is the Christian world more indebted, and none of them exhibits a life more wonderful and instructive. Brought to the faith of Christ by an extraordinary conversion; employed in the most arduous and important services; raised to visions surpassing the powers of human description; a son of sorrow, and a martyr for revealed truth; there are few persons, whose lives are more fraught with interest, or have stronger claims to our consideration.

The conversion of this great Christian hero is, this day, commemorated in the Church. It will, therefore, be a proper, and, with the Divine blessing, a useful employment of our minds, to attend to the principal points of his history, and to the reflections which they suggest. \ Of you all, my brethren, let

me bespeak a patient and candid hearing. It is a subject full of instruction for every mind. But, in an especial manner, if there be in this assembly a man, who is not yet satisfied concerning the truth of our holy religion, him I am anxious to interest. Would to God, I could fill him with candour, and chain his attention to my theme. For unless all laws of reasoning are arbitrary, and all grounds of evidence fallacious, he cannot rise from the faithful contemplation of the argument, which is founded upon the life of St. Paul, without confessing of Christ Jesus, “that He is the Son of God.” \

Saul or Paul, for by both names he is called, was, as he himself informs us, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia. \ This town, famous for its trade and its literature, is supposed by many, to have been honoured, likewise, with municipal distinctions, for its adherence to some Roman Emperor. If it were not so, the father of our Apostle must have obtained the freedom of Rome by merit, or by purchase: for it must be remembered, as furnishing an instructive instance of the providence of God, that St. Paul was born a Jew, but at the same time an heir to the privileges of a Roman citizen. \

His education was liberal. Favoured by nature with strong and active powers, and brought up in one of the most celebrated schools in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel^a,” he united genius with great acquirements. His speeches, and the Epistles which have come down to us bearing his name, display, equally, the force of his mind, and his acquaintance with the literature of his day. Had he not, after the glorious realities of the Gospel were unfolded to his view, counted all his human acquirements “but dung, that he might win Christ^b,” we should be

^a Acts xxii. 3.

^b Phil. iii 8.

induced to remark, in honour of the man, that the most illustrious masters of reasoning and rhetoric, Locke and Longinus, have bestowed on him the meed of their praise.

As might have been expected, the pride of earthly wisdom, and the vanity of Jewish prejudice, unfitted him for the reception of Christ and His doctrines. On the contrary, they qualified him to be an instrument of the opposers of Christianity; and, aided by the natural impetuosity of his temper, rendered him the assiduous and unwearied persecutor of its Author and its advocates. None of the foes to Jesus and His disciples was more known and dreaded. Every where his fame was spread, as the implacable adversary of the sect. Without regard to age or sex; without restraint to time or place, we find him deriding the disciples of the Lord, and dragging them to prison and to torture: and when the first martyr, the amiable St. Stephen, was stoned, this zealous enemy to the Christian faith “was consenting unto his death^c,” and kept the garments of those who executed the horrid deed^d. It must however be observed, (for he tells us that on this account he obtained mercy,) that in his animosity towards the followers of the Redeemer, he was actuated by a zeal, which he thought holy, and by a concern for the religion and honour of his nation, which he thought right. He was a mistaken, not a careless, nor a vicious man. There are those, alas! who, in deriding and opposing the Author of our faith, are impelled only by their levity. Still worse, there are those, who, without regard for any religion, or zeal for any thing good, would destroy the authority and influence of the Gospel, to quiet themselves in their sins, and to accomplish their base purposes

^c Acts viii. 1.

^d Ibid. xxii. 20.

in the world. For such the pious bosom will tremble. Though mercy was found for the honest, yet mistaken Saul, can they expect, that profane levity and determined profligacy will find an apology at the bar of God? No; never. These, I am awfully afraid, are “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction^e.”

But, to return to our subject: “breathing out threatenings and slaughter^f,” Saul is hastening to Damascus, with authority from the high priest to take, without distinction, the abettors of Christianity, and “bring them bound unto Jerusalem^g.” As he journeys with a considerable company, behold, “at mid-day, a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun^h,” shines suddenly upon them and strikes them to the earth.ⁱ It was, probably, the Shechinah; the manifestation of the Divine Presence.^j A voice, terrible and inarticulate as thunder to his companions, but distinct and intelligible to Paul, calls to him from the inexpressible glory, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me,^k” Trembling, and astonished, he inquires, “Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee^k.” As one, who suddenly stops on a precipice, appalled at the danger into which impetuosity had hurried him, Paul stands amazed and dismayed. The manifestation of the Redeemer is irresistible; and he, who had hitherto been solicitous how he might most effectually injure His cause, now calls to Him, in the voice of suppliant obedience, “Lord, what wilt

^e Rom. ix. 22.

^f Acts ix. 1.

^g Ibid. ver. 2.

^h Acts xxvi. 13.

ⁱ Ibid. ver. 14.

^k Ibid. ver. 15, 16.

Thou have me to do¹?" Made blind by the brightness of the glory which appeared, he was led by his companions into the city, which was at hand; where for three days, overwhelmed doubtless with sorrow for the error into which he had fallen, he devoted himself entirely to fasting and prayer. Upon this, for the confirmation of his faith, and comfort of his spirit, another miracle was wrought upon him. His sight was instantly restored to him by a minister of the Redeemer, who also received him into the Church by baptism, and instructed him in the work unto which he was designed. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples, which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

As the wonderful conversion of this Apostle is a great evidence of the truth of our religion; and on it rests the validity of his important testimonies, it deserves our particular examination. Now, St. Paul must be supposed to have been, either honest or dishonest in this matter. From the character he had supported before his conversion; from his appeal to his adversaries, that from his youth "he had lived in all good conscience before God^m;" from the face of his writings and conduct; yea, from his zeal for the religion and tradition of his fathers, candour should infer that he was a conscientious man. While, on the other hand, there is nothing on which we may reasonably found the least suspicion of his veracity. What motives were there to induce a person of his character and prospects, to attempt to impose such a fraud upon the world? Were the adherents to the cause of Christ, able to proffer any inducements, sufficient to win this renowned character to their party? Theirs, alas!

¹ Acts ix. 6.

^m Ibid xxiii. 1.

was the cause of poverty, of trouble, and of persecution; and he their persecutor well knew the miseries to which the followers of the Nazarene would be exposed. Were there any prospects, with which he could have induced himself to practise this deception upon mankind? If he believed, that Jesus Christ was an impostor, and had expired, for ever, on the cross, his good sense could not but have inferred, that his religion, which renounced the aid of the wisdom, wealth, and power of this world, would presently come to nought: and his knowledge of the feelings of his nation, and of the incredulity of mankind, must have assured him, that nothing could be more hopeless than the fate of the advocates of such a cause. Without prospect of any thing, but implacable enmity from those he left, and disgrace and trouble with those he joined; without the least reasonable expectation of wealth, honour, power, or success; what could have induced this sensible, and hitherto upright man, to relinquish the religion of his fathers, which he had highly and zealously prized, for a religion, which he believed to be false; a religion, which he had detested and persecuted; a religion, to which he would be obliged to sacrifice his honours, his connections, his comforts, the advantages of his birth and education, his hope of the favour of his God, and, in all probability, his life? Surely, there is not the least ground, upon which we can doubt, that St. Paul was sincere in his profession, honest in what he related. If his integrity, whose whole life was conformable to his principles, may be called in question, I see not what evidence there can be of any man's veracity; I know not in whose testimony we can ever confide.

But, if St. Paul were honest, either the wonders which produced his conversion were real, or he must

himself have been deceived. Now, there are but three ways, in which his deception could have been possible; by the artifice of evil spirits, by human imposition, or by the enthusiasm or delirium of his own mind. There are few, if any, who can suppose it the artifice of evil spirits. Whatever may be their power, we may be perfectly assured, that they never exercise it in favour of a system of the purest piety and morals; a system, whose leading aim is the destruction of their influence among mankind, and whose precepts inculcate truth and goodness. Was there, then, a delusion practised upon the Apostle by human beings? It is impossible to conceive, in what way any impostor, or set of impostors, could have produced a scene like that which took place in the road to Damascus. And if we should imagine a show, any way similar to it, to have been wrought by imposture, could we believe, that such an one as Saul, would have been its dupe:—that Saul, who was distinguished for penetration and strength of mind; that Saul, whose character was decision, and who carried in his bosom a contempt of the Person whom the miracle aimed to magnify; that Saul, who was an acute logician, a good philosopher, and a keen detector of the artifices of men; that Saul, who, at the very time of the occurrence, was impetuously bent upon destroying the religion of Jesus, and distressing His followers? Recur we, then, to the last supposition. Could a delusion have been occasioned by enthusiasm, or delirium, in his own mind? Enthusiasm generally acts in favour of something dear to it. Its usual course is to warm itself with repeated views of its darling object. It raises, by the application of its own heat to its own opinions, possibilities to probabilities; and these to certainties. It delights to form, and to catch at the most airy ideas, which

favour its expectations and designs. But to make one leave, at once, his fondest opinions; to draw him instantaneously from tenets dear and sacred, to principles long esteemed false and odious:—and this, too, by miracles imagined to be wrought against itself:—these are not the operations of enthusiasm or superstition. Nor can a delirium be assigned as the cause of the Apostle's impressions: for it must be imputed to his companions, as well as to him; no inconsiderable number, we may presume from the nature of their errand: it must be imputed, too, to Ananias, who was supernaturally informed of the vision which St. Paul had seen, notwithstanding the dignity and reasonableness of his conduct, and the good report he had both of Christians and Jews: it must be imputed to the Apostle during his subsequent life: and conceived to have been always consistent; to have enabled him with conspicuous wisdom to adapt means to their ends; to have raised him to a sublime elevation of piety and virtue; and to have qualified him to produce speeches and writings, which, for strength of reasoning, and force of eloquence, vie with the most finished productions of human ingenuity. This, methinks, were a delirium approaching very near to the standard of exalted reason; having very much of the character of "truth and soberness".^a The supposition that the Apostle was himself deceived, is in every shape of it attended with so many and insuperable difficulties, that "an evil heart of unbelief"^b must pervert our own faculties, before we can admit it a moment, as an explanation of his conversion. What now remains? We must acknowledge the reality of the wonderful manifestation of our Redeemer, or betake ourselves to the last, the miserable subter-

^a Acts xxvi. 25.

^b Heb. iii. 12.

fuge, that the whole story is a fabrication, and that no such person as St. Paul ever existed.

This subterfuge, should any resort to it, will be found as untenable as it is bold. For what reason have we to doubt the existence of St. Paul, more than the existence of any celebrated character of antiquity? We believe that Homer and Virgil, that Alexander and Cæsar, that Socrates and Cicero, lived in the ages in which they are said to have lived. On what is this belief founded? On the testimony of historians, and the possession of works bearing their names, which have been attributed to them by all posterity. This is a reasonable and sufficient ground of belief. The nature of the case admits of no other. Now we have minute accounts of St. Paul, in contemporary, and innumerable historians; and we have many and various writings bearing his name, which have been acknowledged as his in every age, from the time of his life to the present day. Such, too, is the nature of these writings, that they carry in themselves evidence of their authenticity. Do we doubt, that there were Christian Churches in Rome, in Corinth, and in Ephesus? But, while these Churches were in being, could Epistles have been spread abroad, as addressed to them, which they had never received? Or could they have received Epistles from St. Paul, referring to visits made them, to wonders wrought among them, and to instructions given them, if St. Paul had never existed? Yet, such Epistles are quoted as his by many writers in the first centuries; and have been preserved as a part of canonical Scripture, in all ages of the Church. We have, too, records of his testimony, as ancient as his day; and vestiges of his labours preserved by tradition, to many regions which were blessed with his visits. When, therefore, we are ready to renounce all confidence in the writings, and all belief in the existence,

of the distinguished characters of antiquity: when we are willing to set all historical evidence at defiance, and to quit the only ground upon which we can have any knowledge of the transactions in the ages before us: then we may doubt the authenticity of the story of St. Paul, and the genuineness of his writings. But till then, I see no alternative remaining, which a reasonable man can take, but to confess the reality of the vision, which converted this great Apostle to Christianity.

There is, indeed, in this miraculous event, as if designed by God, a remarkable combination of reasons, which substantiate its credibility. There is no other ground upon which we can, with any plausibility, account for the Apostle's conduct. It is a kind of miracle, which no one, who believes in a Deity, will say was impossible, nor upon the supposition of the truth of Christianity, will any one say, it was unnecessary. The end appears worthy of the effort; and both the effort and end worthy of the Almighty. The circumstances which attended the event, were such as would have facilitated detection if it were false, and the consequences of it were such, as might be expected, if it were true. But I am particularly anxious to remark, and to dwell upon the remark, that the subsequent life and conduct of St. Paul are the best evidences of the truth and sincerity of his conversion. They were exactly, and in all respects such, as we should suppose would be produced by an occurrence, so extraordinary and solemn, so impressive and consequential.

His great favour and interest with the rulers and chief priests of his nation; his high pretensions to unblameableness in the righteousness of the law; his pride in his acquirements of human wisdom and accomplishments; the honours of his station and his flattering prospects in the world, he cheerfully re-

nounced them all. As the youth, who is raised to the views and expectations of mankind, abandons the toys and sports of his boyish days, so these no longer enamour the Apostle, now that the salvation which is in Jesus, is disclosed to his view. How hard is it to forego the charms of honour, of science, and of life's flattering distinctions! What can reconcile men to these self-denials, but an abiding conviction of the reference of this life to another, and a lively faith in the unspeakable joys of the future? To him, indeed, who has tasted the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ^p," and known "the powers of the world to come^q:" to him, to whom the Son of God stands revealed as a Saviour, death as an entrance upon an eternal existence, and heaven as the reward of the faithful: to him, indeed, in the calm estimate of reflection, every thing else must appear of little value. In renouncing, therefore, the distinctions, pleasures, and designs of this world, and devoting himself wholly to the attainment of the "prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^r," St. Paul has given a noble evidence, that the scene on his way to Damascus was a clear and satisfactory manifestation to him of the ascended Saviour, whom he had persecuted.

Soon after his enlistment under the banners of the Gospel, we find him waging his Master's warfare with courage, skill, and determination. To his own countrymen, who had witnessed his outrages upon the followers of the Messiah, he first, with undaunted confidence, declared his faith in Him: proving to them from Moses and the Prophets, that Christ must needs suffer and die; and that this Jesus, whom they had crucified, was very Christ. But he was taught by the Lord, that it should be his office to carry the tidings of salvation to the Gentile world. This was

^p Phil. iii. 8.

^q Heb. vi. 5.

^r Phil. iii. 14.

a task, to undertake which required more than human enterprise and philanthropy ; to accomplish which required a patience, perseverance, intrepidity and exemplariness, which could be furnished only from above. In this vast and important work, St. Paul “ laboured more abundantly than all” his brethren. They took to themselves, generally, some province, or part of a country, where, with pious diligence, they inculcated and spread the truths of revelation. But the measure of *his* cares was the extent of the human race ; the bounds of *his* labours were the limits of the world. Memory and the time would fail me, should I attempt to recount to you, his travels and exertions. Borne, now, on the wings of Christian zeal, and actuated by the spirit of Christian love, he seems to have carried the glad tidings of redemption into almost every region, from the distant recesses of the East, to the utmost Islands of the West. Nor were his sorrows less than his labours. Was he in Ephesus, or journeying to Spain ; was he bound to Rome, or would he go to Jerusalem ; in every place, “ the Holy Ghost witnessed, that bonds and afflictions would abide him.” “ But none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus.” It would seem by the plain, yet pathetic summary of his sufferings, that for the proof of his faith, and the perfecting of his character, adversity was permitted to bring him all her cups to taste : and of each one which he tasted, compelled him to repeat the draught. “ In labour more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^t Acts xx. 23.

^u Ibid. ver. 24.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned. thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches^x.”

Thus, from the day of his conversion, passed the life of this once proud, and implacable foe to Christianity, in humility and faith, in travels and labours, in affliction, charity, and continual exertions for the success of the Gospel. Like the sun, he stood not still ; but constantly diffused upon some dark region or other, the glorious light with which he himself was illumined. And like the sun, his lustre was more lovely, and his diligence seemed to increase, as he verged towards the evening of life, and hastened to set. Afflictions, which damp most men's perseverance, renovated his. Age, which brings others repose, called forth his noblest energies. And the approach of death, which sobers every mind, filled him with exultation. “ I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day^y.”

In the reign of Nero, ready, if the will of God should be so, to give his life a sacrifice to his faith, he returned to Rome. There, his success in governing with St. Peter, and extending the Church, drew on him the hatred and persecution of a corrupt go-

^x 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^y 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

vernment : and in the sixty-eighth year of his age, by the command of the monster, to whom the Church owes the blood of many of its martyrs, and fallen nature a new disgrace, this champion of Christianity expired on a scaffold !

His successors in the ministry have a rich legacy in the example he has left them, of pastoral fidelity and judicious zeal. To all the disciples of the Redeemer, his writings are a treasure of divine wisdom, of inestimable value. In his defence before Agrippa, his discourse upon the resurrection, and several parts of his Epistles, the man of taste may be delighted, while the Christian is edified. But it is particularly to the unbeliever, that his life presents the most important instruction. For the change of his opinion, his extraordinary labours, virtues, and successes ; the willingness with which he encountered the fatigues and sufferings of his ministry ; and the readiness with which he sealed his testimony with his blood : it is impossible to assign any other adequate cause, than that he had received satisfactory, and irresistible evidence, that the Gospel he had persecuted was a revelation from God. When I contemplate the conversion of this Apostle, in all its circumstances and consequences, I am ready to believe that the Most High, in condescension to the weakness of faith in the children of men, has vouchsafed to give them an evidence of the authority of His Son, which should be unexceptionable and irresistible. It is a pillar of our faith, which levity may attempt to soil, and sophistry may endeavour to mar ; but, like the pillars in the eternal temple of Jehovah, it shall stand for ever ; upheld by truth, and admired, both in its strength and beauty, of all them that believe.

SERMON LX.

—◆—
ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. JOHN THE
BAPTIST.
—◆—

ST. MATTHEW, xi. 11.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.

WHAT an encomium is here upon that renowned person and distinguished saint, whose nativity, the Church, this day, commemorates; an encomium, too, from the mouth of the highest and most perfect discerner of characters, the Eternal Son of God. It will not be amiss, my brethren, but very pertinent and commendable, to turn our attention to the life of the man, upon whom our blessed Lord hath bestowed such honourable expression of His respects, and approbation. A character, which Christ commends, can never be studied without advantage.

The course, which our thoughts will most naturally take, is, to inquire in what the Baptist was so remarkable, as to have merited and obtained such discriminating praise.

And, in the first place, he was peculiarly remarkable in his birth, and office. There is a striking and beautiful analogy, in all the works of God. Great, and remote events, are typified in those which

are immediate, and of less magnitude: and His spiritual economy is frequently illustrated in the arrangements of His material world. When the sun approaches to scatter the darkness of night, and cheer and invigorate creation with his beams, he is preceded by the morning star ushering him in with its fainter dawn. In like manner, when the more glorious “Sun of Righteousness^a” was about to rise upon our benighted world, the Most High ordained, that an harbinger should go before Him “to prepare His way^b,” and announce His coming. It was reserved for a pious pair, who were both righteous before God, “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless^c,” to be assured by an angel sent from God, that they should give birth to the person who should execute this extraordinary office. The Prophets had predicted his appearance and character, as the herald of Messiah the Prince: and in the spirit and life, and even attire of the good Elijah, this herald had been typified. At the appointed time, contrary to the expectation and hopes of nature, Zacharias and Elisabeth were blessed with this wonderful child, filled with the Holy Ghost from the womb: so much like Elijah as by many to be taken for him, and so precisely at the period, when the Jews were expecting the promised Deliverer, that some supposed he was, indeed, the Christ. Considered as the forerunner of our Lord, there is something in him peculiarly interesting, and entitled to appropriate respect. We admire the exact fulfilment of prophecies, and striking accomplishment of types; and we cannot wonder that Gabriel declared to the amazed Zacharias, “Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth^d.”

^a Mal. iv. 2.

^c Luke i. 6.

^b Ibid. iii. 1.

^d Ibid. ver. 14.

Having noticed his peculiar office, and the circumstances of his birth, we proceed to observe, that St. John was eminently distinguished by his piety and humility. There is an intimate and nice relation, between all the virtues and duties of life. This is very observable in piety and humility. They can hardly subsist apart. The man cannot be pious, who is not humble; and seldom is he adorned with humility who is not pious. They generate each other in the heart. In the life of the Baptist, there is such a display of these conjoined graces, as exhibits him at no ordinary point of moral elevation. When our blessed Lord presented Himself a candidate for His baptism, an occasion which would have elated and flattered many a teacher of righteousness, his unassuming modesty, and holy reverence for the Redeemer, form a most lovely picture. “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me^e?” Astonished at the singularity of his appearance and doctrines, the Jews mused in their hearts, whether he were not the Christ, and sent messengers to ask him the question. Had he been impious, here was opportunity to arrogate to himself divine honours. Had he been ambitious, here was an occasion to have placed himself at the head of his nation. But equally to be admired for his diffidence of himself and his devotion to his Lord, he replied, “There cometh one after me, mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose^f.” But why do I adduce particular instances? His whole life was one continued exhibition of self-denial, and religious devotion. For him, the plaudits of fame and the trophies of power had no charms. In him, “soft raiment^g” and delicate life excited no covetous desires. In the plain,

^e Matt. iii. 14.^f Mark i. 7.^g Matt. xi. 8.

coarse garb of the penitent ; sequestered from the haunts of pride and pleasure, he held the holy tenor of his way :

(‘ The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,
His food the fruits, his drink the crystal well.
Remote from man, with God he pass’d his days,
Prayer all his business ; all his pleasure, praise.’

Deep must have been his sense of sin ; strong his principles of sobriety ; great his love of God, who could retire from all the voluptuousness of life, to the wilderness of Judea ; and content himself for sustenance, with “ locusts and wild honey^h.” In his public ministry, he evidenced the motives of his austerity. “ Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at handⁱ,” was the substance of all his discourses.

But I haste to observe, that the Baptist did not live for himself alone. His austerity did not degenerate into a mere concern for his own salvation. In his devotion to God, he did not forget, that he owed much to his fellow beings. For he was not more distinguished by the properties which have already been mentioned, than by his zeal for the propagation of truth, and the welfare of his countrymen. What do I see ! “ Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,” are flocking to him to be “ baptized, confessing their sins^k.” The amiable man has been amongst them as their friend, declaring and reproofing their vices, and warning them of the approach of Messiah, with rich blessings for those who would receive Him, and awful judgments for His enemies. It was a dissolute, as well as an important period with the Jewish nation. Now was the fulfilment of the promise to their fathers at

^h Mark i. 6.

ⁱ Matt. iii. 2.

^k Ibid. ver. 5, 6.

hand ; the advent of “ the consolation of Israel¹ ;” the incarnation of the Son of God. But they were absorbed in the expectation of a temporal prince, and the desires of worldly felicity ; and immersed in all the vices and hypocrisies, to which such views of religion and life ever gave birth. St. John beheld them with regret. He was bold and anxious in his reproofs. And it was concern for his country, as well as fidelity to the Lord, which induced him to assume an unequalled austerity of life ; that he might influence them by his example, as well as his instructions, “ to bring forth fruits meet for repentance^m.” How great and good does he appear, in this view of him ! How commendable is every man, who thus sorrows for the vices, and is solicitous for the welfare of his fellow beings ! And let it be observed, in passing, that a true regard for the happiness of our countrymen, and the human race, is ever connected with a regard for their religious and moral improvement. The schemes are fanciful and fallacious, which would separate civil from moral improvement ; temporal from religious happiness. Unfortunate Jews ! Ye are a solemn monument of the truth of this observation. Happy had it been for you, had ye listened to the pious Baptist, as the harbinger of Christ, and received the Messiah whom he pointed out and preached. But they were carried away with schemes of their own aggrandisement ; they preferred to be led by their ambitious and jealous rulers. And when the Saviour “ came unto His own, His own received Him notⁿ.” They suffered, alas ! in the destruction of their city and polity, the just judgment of God upon their perverseness ; and continue to this day every where, a distinct, and no where, an established people. Hasten,

¹ Luke ii. 25.

^m Matt. iii. 8.

ⁿ John i. 11.

great God, the promised time, when Thou wilt gather them with Thine arms, and bring them to Thy flock, and we shall be happy in ‘one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ*!’

But to return: we observe, in the last place, that the Baptist was eminently remarkable for his dignified resolution, and manly constancy in the cause of righteousness. He was not, as our Saviour happily expressed it, in His ironical questions to the multitude concerning John, “a reed shaken with the wind^o.” He was the avowed advocate, and determined professor of virtue. Never was a more steady and undaunted adherence to principle, exemplified by man. Not the sneers and scoffings of the profane; not the influence of fashion; not the frowns nor the smiles of the great, could bend this prodigy of rectitude from the path of duty. He was amongst “a crooked generation^p.” He stood before a corrupt court. But neither flattery nor threats could bring him to a truce with vice. Into the bosom of Herod himself, he carried his reproofs. The adulteries and iniquities of this profligate Tetrarch, he dared to reprehend; and in the cause of virtue finally shed his blood. Herod to the black catalogue of his crimes “added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison^q,” and in an hour of intemperance and rashness, at the instigation of the lewd woman with whom he lived in the basest intimacy, commanded the holy man to be beheaded. Thus in an age when sincerity was wonderful, and virtue was singular, did the good Baptist ‘constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth’s sake †.’

* Collect for Good Friday.

^o Matt. xi. 7.

^p Deut. xxxii. 5.

^q Luke iii. 20.

† Collect for the Feast of St. John the Baptist.

When we review his extraordinary birth and office; his unequalled piety and humility; his noble concern for truth, and the happiness of his countrymen; and his dignified resolution and manly constancy, even unto death, in the cause of righteousness, we see a rare example of excellence, and feel the truth of our Lord's declaration, that "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

A few observations, pertinent to this subject, suggest themselves to close this discourse.

We are not called, I conceive, my Christian friends, to exercise all the austerity which the Baptist practised. Our divine exemplar, the blessed Redeemer, hath remarked, that "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine," and that He Himself was "come eating and drinking^r:" hereby teaching us that His "kingdom" consisteth not in "meat and drink, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost^s." But there is a measure of self-denial, salutary to the growth of goodness, and which, as Christians, we are bound to practise. Whatever is vain in the pomps of the world; whatever is covetous in its pursuits; whatever is sinful in the desires of the flesh, we renounced at our baptism: and if we would preserve our interest in Christ, are solemnly obliged to fulfil our vows. While therefore we enjoy all that we can innocently enjoy, and guard against a selfish sequestered pursuit only of our own salvation, we are to remember that the world is infectious; and that Jesus hath said of His disciples, "They are not of the world^t."

Again. We may learn from what has been said, how certainly respect attends integrity. Though his manners had not received the polish of refinement,

^r Luke vii. 33, 34.

^s Rom. xiv. 17.

^t John xvii. 16.

and the people were very depraved among whom he lived, the Scriptures assure us, that all men revered John^u. There is something so great, so elevated, in the character whom nothing can cause to swerve from principle and duty, that the mind is forced to approve, the heart is compelled to respect. Even the vicious are conscious of inferiority; and under the vail of profligacy carry a secret, unconquerable reverence for the good man. Herod, the debauched, heedless Herod, who had only to speak and the Baptist should be put out of life, could not suppress in his bosom that awe of his virtue, which such resolute integrity never fails to excite. His base paramour had, before the fatal hour, sought to kill the reprovcr of her vices, but could not: for, says the historian, “ Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy^x.” Could a more striking evidence of the majesty of virtue be adduced? It is an instructive lesson to us all, but especially so to my young friends, who are yet forming the character of their lives. You will find enough of your own age, and, indeed, of an age that should set you better examples, ridiculing the principles of righteousness, and spurning at the restraints of duty. But be assured, my young friends, there is an innate superiority in virtue, which the most profane and profligate do secretly reverence, and from which they would decoy you, for no other reason, but because superior excellence is always irksome to corrupt minds. Be induced with manly resolution, to build your characters on the godlike principles of truth and rectitude; and you will find that, with regard to the esteem of your fellow men, as well as in other important respects, the maxim of the wise man is strictly true, “ he that walketh uprightly walketh surely^y.”

^u Matt. xiv. 5; xxi. 26.

^x Mark vi. 20.

^y Prov. x. 9.

Finally. To the honourable encomium, which raised St. John to a level with the greatest “that are born of women,” our blessed Lord hath added this remark: “notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he:” greater in the measure of revelation bestowed upon us; greater in the relation which we are adopted to bear to God and His Christ; greater in the truths with which we are impressed, they being the fulfilment of what he understood only, as to come; and greater in the promise of the Father, to raise us to be “kings and priests”² unto Him in His eternal kingdom. How thankful then should we be for our Christian vocation! With what sobriety and self-respect, should we walk through this probationary life! Let us endeavour, by a bright exhibition of the Christian excellencies, to indicate the dawn of the days of righteousness and peace. Let us all be anxious ‘so to prepare and make ready the way’ of our Lord, ‘by turning the hearts of the disobedient,’ through the influence of our example, ‘to the wisdom of the just; that at His second coming to judge the world, we may be found acceptable in His sight*,’ and be taken by Him to enjoy, with St. John the Baptist and all the Prophets, with the Apostles and all the Martyrs, and with all the “spirits of just men made perfect³,” that glorious rest, which, through His merits, is reserved in heaven for the people of God.

² Rev. i. 6.; v. 10.

³ Heb. xii. 23.

* Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent.

SERMON LXI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PETER.

ST. MATTHEW, xvi. 17.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

To contemplate the characters, whose names and conduct the Divine Spirit has rescued from oblivion, is an employment obligatory upon the Christian, pleasant and instructive. Their lives were recorded purposely for the perusal and benefit of mankind. The diversity of incident, the view of our own nature in various interesting shapes, and the improving lessons which they impress on the heart, amuse while we consider, and carry us interested through, the hallowed tales.

Among the characters who appear in the Gospel history, St. Peter holds a conspicuous place. St. Peter foremost of Apostles, all-powerful in preaching and in miracles, revered by Romanists as the Church's head, noblest in confessing, frailest in denying the Lord. His life, together with St. Paul's, furnish the principal materials of which the Acts of the Apostles are composed: and his Epistles form a valuable part of canonical Scripture. Richly fraught with lessons for us all, is the history of this Christian hero. And as the day, set apart by our Church in

honour of his memory, falls in this year with the weekly solemnity, there cannot be a more pertinent, nor surely, with the Divine blessing, a more profitable, subject for our present meditations. To trace the leading incidents of his life; to mark the prominent features of his character; to gather the reflections which invite observation:—these be our labours: and to profit alike by his virtues and his frailties, this be the consecration of our work.

Of the parentage of St. Peter we know nothing more, than that he was descended of one Jona, or John. His father, however, seems to have been in indigent circumstances: for this son was bred to the occupation of a fisherman. To toil upon the lake of Gennesaret for an humble livelihood was St. Peter's employ, and in this laborious business, he was associated with three others of the most eminent disciples of our Lord. When we behold the great Apostle dragging his net in the waters, or mending it upon the shore, it seems not probable, that he had received of his parents, nor been able to afford himself, many advantages of education. In the place indeed of his nativity, these advantages were not easily attainable. He was born in Bethsaida, a village, upon the border of the lake, small in his youthful days, and chiefly inhabited by fishermen and huntsmen, notwithstanding the name and magnificence, which it shortly after acquired. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are^a.”

The scene in which he is first introduced, is his first

^a 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

interview with Christ, as related in St. John's Gospel. This interview he owed under Heaven, to the affection of a younger brother. When the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples, as "the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world^b," St. Andrew was one of the happy two, who followed Him to His abode, and became acquainted with Him^c. The first care of this amiable man to whom was allotted the crown of martyrdom, was to find his own brother Simon, and disclose to him the discovery of the Messiah^d. St. Peter went with him to behold the Man, and as soon as he was come, Jesus called him by name, declared to him his descent, and gave him a prophetic notice of his future destination^e. Thus to fraternal love and zeal is owing the first intercourse between Christ and this His renowned follower. Happy would it be, if in every family the ties of affection bound the members as closely together, and each one were as anxious that the whole should be brought to see and acknowledge "Him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write^f."

It appears, however, that St. Peter did not at that time attach himself wholly to Christ. He returned to his home, and pursued his occupation. At a later period, after St. John was cast into prison, Jesus came the second time into Galilee. It was then, that walking by Gennesaret, He saw the fishermen and their boats, and in Simon's boat taught the people who pressed to hear Him. He now ordained the miraculous draught of fishes; which stupendous act wrought conviction in the mind of St. Peter, that He was the Lord, filled him with becoming reverence and fear, and laid the foundation of his adherence to Christ. The Saviour at this time bade him follow

^b John i. 29. 36.

^c Ibid. ver. 39.

^d Ibid. ver. 41.

^e Ibid. ver. 42.

^f Ibid. ver. 45.

Him, and taught him, that his occupation would be greatly changed; that in future, it should be his business to take and save the souls of men^g. Here is the date of St. Peter's determined attachment to our Lord. Human imagination, any thing he had heard of men, flesh and blood, did not, could not fix his faith in Christ. But when by the power of the Father, displayed in the works and word of the Messiah, and by internal assistance to discern rightly His character and truth, it was revealed to St. Peter that He was the Christ, he confessed, he adored, he left his friends, his business, his home, his all, and followed Him. His faith was grounded on the divine evidences in Christ's favour; to estimate which evidences, he was blest with a happy readiness. Similar, and increased evidences are offered to all, and a like readiness to discern them will be given to those, who with docile minds implore it of the Almighty. A faith thus founded is the firmest and most satisfactory. It will enable any possessor of it, (whatever men may say of the Redeemer; yea, though the world should renounce His Gospel;) to adhere to Simon's confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God^h."

Humility is the sure attendant of real greatness. It is an indication of worth in any character. Of all worth, it is an ornament. This virtue appears among the first exhibited in this great Apostle, and breaks forth upon us frequently in the conduct of his life, as one of his peculiar properties. Upon his full discovery of the Saviour's character in the boat, this virtue was seen in St. Peter in its genuine nature, and loveliness. He felt conscious of imperfections; he felt his unworthiness of the special notice of Christ. He prostrated himself at His feet, and exclaimed,

^g Luke v. 10.

^h Matt. xvi. 16.

“ Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord ^l.” Conscious of frailties ; sensible of the infinite distance between him and the Christ ; shrinking from the supposition that he could be serviceable to the Lord ; he was oppressed by His presence, and felt, as once the noble Centurion felt, and as every true disciple of the Redeemer must often feel, “ not worthy that He should come under his roof ^k.” How interesting the scene ! Behold this mighty Apostle at Jesus’ feet. Our hearts are relieved as well as his, when our Saviour encourages him tenderly, with a declaration of the high office to which he was destined. Often was the same lowliness of character seen in his life. How graceful does his humility appear, when wounded by the approach of his Master, to do for him a menial yet symbolic service, he exclaimed, “ Thou shalt never wash my feet ^l !” And yet when Christ told him the necessity of his submitting to be washed, how readily he relinquished his own sentiments to his Teacher : “ Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head ^m !” None of the Apostles received distinctions more calculated to elate the mind, than he did. But though they were so great, that posterity have founded on them, for him, pretensions to such eminence, as they never conferred ; it is remarkable that he wore his honours with unassuming propriety, arrogating to himself no superiority over his fellow Apostles, but exerting himself even in the smallest offices for the gratification of his Master and brethren, and the salvation of men. Throughout his ministry, he was, as his catholic Epistle exhorted all Christians to be, “ clothed with humility ⁿ :” and the stamp of his lowliness was set by his contemporaries, who testify, that he thought himself

^l Luke v. 8.^k Matt. viii. 8.^l John xiii. 8.^m Ibid. ver. 9.ⁿ 1 Pet. v. 5.

unworthy to die on the cross in the position, in which his Lord expired.

It is a frequent remark of good moralists, that humility is congenial with true greatness of spirit, and all the energies of a manly character. Following St. Peter in his attendance upon our Lord, and his discharge of the ministry to which he was appointed, we find the observation verified. His meekness was blended with courage; his humble sense of his unworthiness, with zeal for the truth. There opens upon us an honest warmth, an ingenuous boldness, which though we fear the consequences, we cannot but admire. Who can avoid approving emotions, when, in the earnestness of regard, he girds on his fisher's coat, and plunges into the waves to swim to the Lord, whom St. John had discovered upon the shore? What bosom is not sensible to his heroism, when, conscious of the integrity of his cause, he checked Malchus in the garden, and thought with two swords, and a little band of ten, to protect his Master from the armed rabble, which came out to take Him? Who can withhold admiration at his firmness, when he appears before the Sanhedrim, or rises in the Synagogue? In the discharge of his ministerial duties, what general dignity, wisdom, candour and stedfast perseverance! The union of humility like his, with such ingenuous frankness and honest zeal, constitute a character which we cannot help loving and respecting, and which the Most High delights to honour.

Accordingly it is to be observed that eminent honours, favours, and marks of distinction were bestowed on St. Peter by his Lord. Early called to the knowledge of Christ, he was admitted to His most intimate confidence. It was his privilege to witness the transfiguration of his Redeemer. In the selection of the twelve from the number of followers,

to be His ambassadors and representatives to all the earth, he was the first. In the retirements of his Master, and the sacred scene of Gethsemane, he, if any one, was an attendant. He had, on one occasion, the special prayers of Christ to the Father, and was assured that, though Satan would sift him, he should not be lost, and might be a means of strengthening his brethren. But the greatest of his honours, and that which, in the calendar of half the Christian world, has elevated St. Peter to supremacy, is recorded in the passage of which the text is a part. “ And Jesus said unto Him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed” My character “ unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven °.” These words of Christ have been stretched by some to an amazing extent ; and by others, they are almost reduced to a passage without meaning. One has made of them an elevation of St. Peter over all Apostles, to the place of Christ ; the other has made of them a reward to his faith of senseless sounds. That some honour or reward was conferred on St. Peter by this declaration of his Lord, is indisputable. What that honour was, whether it was participated by the rest of the Apostles, or how it was realized, are points which are intimately connected with the history we are contemplating. That the declaration did not communicate a supremacy of power over the rest of the Apostles, is evident from a variety of consi-

° Matt. xvi. 17—19.

derations. It does not appear, that St. Peter ever claimed, or exercised such a superiority. Before this commission, induced by his seniority, or natural eagerness, he had often led the debate and spoken for the whole. And after it, he did on many occasions rank first, and chiefly manage the common weal. But it was a distinction of rank, not of authority. There was no pre-eminence in power. If any thing he did were wrong or displeasing, no doubt it was corrected by the rest. Indeed, he was by the Apostles called to account for his intercourse with Cornelius, and when he was to be blamed for Judaizing in Antioch, we know that St. Paul “withstood him to the face ^p.” Besides, the expressions in the declaration which convey power, are afterwards applied to all the Apostles, and expressions synonymous are used by our Saviour in the farewell commission given to the eleven, immediately before His ascension into heaven. The giving of the keys was clearly symbolical of the power of the receiver, to open and shut, to bind and to loose, to admit and to exclude, and in general to manage, or superintend the management of all the spiritual interests of the Church. This power was declared to the twelve, without the use of the symbol, when at Capernaum He assured them, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven ^q.” The declaration was confirmed alike to St. Peter, and to them, in the grand commission they received when they were assembled after His resurrection, and He stood in the midst: “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained ^r.”

But if all share in the Apostolic authority, what

^p Gal. ii. 11.

^q Matt. xviii. 18.

^r John xx. 23.

distinction was conferred on St. Peter? Something appropriate to him, was certainly intended by those explicit words, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church^r." Let us give the most probable purport of the words, and, recurring to the life of the Apostle, observe how the promised honour was realized. This, then, we conceive to be the substance of our Saviour's declaration. Thou, instructed of My Father, hast nobly confessed Me to be the Christ. I acknowledge thee, Peter, fitly named a rock. Thou shalt be the first stone, or pillar of My Church. From thee shall be its first growth. Thy preaching, thy firmness, thy labour shall make the beginning, shall lay the foundation; and, once established, it shall never be overthrown. Now, if we can find all this fulfilled, and nothing more relating to the subject experienced by the great Apostle, all doubts and difficulties must vanish, and every mind be satisfied with the construction of the text. Return we, then, to the sacred history. When the Lord was risen from the dead, who of the Apostles was favoured with the first appearance? St. Peter. Who proposed, and managed, the filling of the vacancy made in the body of the Apostles, by the fall of Judas? St. Peter. When our Saviour, about to leave the earth, determined to vest that power which He had received of the Father, in certain of His followers, for the government and benefit of the Church on earth, the power of receiving, rejecting, teaching, judging, forgiving, &c., who was the first selected to this great, and honourable office; to this support of the form, and order, and purity of the Church? Was it not St. Peter? This same Apostle first preached the risen Jesus, and by an irresistible discourse gathered the

^r Matt. xvi. 18.

first increase from the Jews, even three thousand souls. He, too, first opened the Gospel to the Gentiles, and Cornelius and his family were the fruits. In all these things, from which arose by gentle gradations the visible Gospel Church, St. Peter was eminently the chief instrument. We see his Master's promise verified. In these honours, the excellent qualities of the Apostle were called into exertion, and his humility, zeal, and noble confession of Christ abundantly rewarded. We see his virtues, observe his favour with Him who distributeth all gifts, and acknowledging him first of Apostles, unite a reverence with our love for his character.

Our time having now elapsed, the subject will be resumed in the afternoon.

SERMON LXII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PETER.

ST. MATTHEW, xvi. 17.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

IN our discourse, fellow Christians, this morning, concerning the great Apostle, whom the Church honours this day, as highly favoured of her Lord, we adverted to his origin and occupation; to his felicity in having a Christian brother who first spake to him of the Messiah; to the miracle which wrought conviction in his mind, and his consequent call and resolution to follow Jesus; to that humility, and that ardour, and that manliness, when convinced, which were so strikingly combined in him, and form the most prominent features of his character; and to the honours and distinctions conferred upon him, by the Most High. Under this last topic, we considered more particularly, the declaration of our Lord: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in

heaven^a.” And while from the same delegation of power being conveyed to the other Apostles, in nearly the same words ; from St. Peter’s never having claimed, or exercised any pre-eminence over the eleven ; from his being called to account by them in a particular instance, and being withstood in another case by St. Paul ; and from the circumstance of St. James, the Bishop of the mother Church of Jerusalem, not St. Peter*, being placed in the Presidency of the first convention of the Church, after the ascension of our Lord, we inferred that the use of the keys was equally shared by all the Apostles, and that there was no ground offered, in the text and context, for attributing to St. Peter, as the Romanists have erroneously, and it is here supposed unhappily done, any supremacy :—we, nevertheless, saw in the special mercies and favours which Christ vouchsafed to him, and especially in his being the first preacher of the Christian faith, and in his gathering both the first Jews, and the first Gentiles who were added unto the Church, a fulfilment of our Lord’s emphatic and discriminating promise to him : and reasons why we should study his life, and reverence his memory as one, whom the Head of the Church had delighted to honour.

We here resume the history of this distinguished Apostle, and although there are forebodings, which, perhaps, the very boldness and ardour for which he was distinguished, would warrant, it is not without a persuasion, that his faith which was so well founded, and our Lord’s promise which is for ever sure, will bring him through every furnace, to which, in the subsequent discharge of the ministry committed

^a Matt. xvi. 18, 19.

* The last circumstance is not mentioned in the preceding Sermon, an inaccuracy, which it is hoped may be excused in a posthumous publication, not intended for the press by the Author.

to him, he may be exposed, purified by the fire and seven times refined.

Warm in his affections, his faith grounded upon evidence, and noticed with many favours, it would naturally be expected, that St. Peter would be sanguine in his attachment to his Lord. His affection for his Master and for his cause, was exceedingly ardent. It seemed, indeed, as if nothing should “separate him from the love of Christ^b.” Twice, he was foremost to confess his conviction, that He was the Messiah. Tender and determinate was his reply, when the Saviour asked the disciples, whether they, with the multitude, would also go away. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life^c.” He was conscious to himself of the most sincere devotion to his Master. Anxious for His safety, studious of His accommodation, careful of His honour, he thought there was no suffering which he could not endure, no sacrifice which he could not make, if his Lord’s necessities required it. When the Saviour declared, that one of the twelve should betray Him, no one was so uneasy as St. Peter to have the dreadful truth explained. When He declared that all His disciples should forsake Him in the night of His distress, no one was so wounded as St. Peter at the thought. Overflowing with affection, sure of its constancy, confident of his strength, he exults to say, “Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death^d. Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee^e.”

We seem here to see human nature in its “best state^f,” and virtue at its highest elevation. But alas! that nature is fallen; that virtue is frail. We tremble as we advance. Blessed Apostle, would that we

^b Rom. viii. 35.

^c John vi. 68.

^d Luke xxii. 33.

^e Matt. xxvi. 35.

^f Ps. xxxix. 5.

could end thy story here! But, as if to put a reproach upon all human confidence; as if to teach us that of ourselves we are nothing; and that “there is” indeed “none good, save one, that is, God^g,” as if to beget in us charity for all men, and to furnish the most powerful enforcement of the sacred admonition, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall^b,” as if to keep us sleeplessly vigilant over ourselves, and constantly exercising an immovable trust in God;—this great Apostle is permitted to err; and the Spirit of God, in the sacred record, has exhibited to us even St. Peter fallen! In an evil hour, this humble, zealous, honoured, affectionate Apostle, overcome by his fears, denied that he ever knew his Lord! It was St. Peter’s failing, to rely too much on his own strength; he did not build his confidence sufficiently on the Divine support, nor recur to this and rest upon it in the hour of difficulty, temptation, and danger. By this he incurred the reproach of feeble faith, and was brought to the awful error of his life. It is an humiliating incident. Let us look on it, not to revile, but to compassionate the offender. He has his Lord’s forgiveness. Yes, before the offence, the kind Redeemer made his apology; “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weakⁱ.” The eye which turned, as the cock crew, upon the terrified disciple, while it looked reproof, beamed forth pity and forgiveness. Soon as the Redeemer had risen from the grave, the angel evinces his tenderness for the offender’s feelings, “Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter^k.” And on the triple declaration of his love, to St. Peter it is given “to feed Christ’s lambs^l.” Indeed, he atoned with sighs and labours for his

^g Luke xviii. 19.

^b 1 Cor. x. 13.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 41.

^k Mark xvi. 7.

^l John xxi. 15.

apostasy. Never was contrition greater than his, when “he went out, and wept bitterly^m.” The tears came from his heart; his anguish was “bitter.” But by exertion he laboured to compensate the Church for the disgrace he brought upon it. We find him with unequalled boldness, preaching Jesus to His very murderers. He traversed all lands, to carry the Gospel of his Lord. In Asia and in Africa, we trace his steps. In Europe he preached Christ. Every where he sacrificed comfort, and hazarded his life, that he might promote his Master’s cause. Not power, not pomp, not all the threats of malice, not the dread armory of judicial death, could dismay him. To demolish the strong holds of error, and bring men to the knowledge of redemption through Jesus, he was ready and desirous to “spend and be spentⁿ” in the Lord’s service. Kindly Christ had forewarned him, that when “he should be old, another should gird him, and carry him whither he would not^o.” St. Peter treasured in his bosom this prophetic notice, that he should be crucified. But when old age approached, and he was sure that he should shortly put off his tabernacle, as the Lord had showed him, he abated not his boldness, nor his zeal. We follow him to Rome, unappalled by Nero, at whose name nature shudders. There, persecuted and perplexed, he governed with St. Paul the Church they together founded; till the cruel emperor, intoxicated with malice, barbarously scourged St. Peter, and nailed him, a willing and exulting martyr, to the cross.

Thus died this great Apostle, after nearly forty years’ service devoted to his Master’s honour, the establishment of Christianity, and the salvation of mankind. There are some inferences from the his-

^m Matt. xxvi. 75.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

^o John xxi. 18.

tory of this Apostle, which you will allow me to suggest, in closing this discourse.

In the first place, in considering the history of St. Peter, we are struck with the holiness and dignity of the Christian Priesthood. It is evident, that “the kingdom of heaven^p,” in the commission to the Apostles, signified the Church, and that the keys of it were given to him, to exercise on earth. No one can suppose our Saviour intended, that at the death of St. Peter these keys should be lost; nor is it probable, they were then to be resumed by Himself. The delegation of the power, in itself, supposes the necessity, or expediency of its being exercised by some persons in the world: and the communication of it afterwards to all the Apostles, shows that its operation was not to be confined to St. Peter, nor to terminate at his dissolution. The truth is, in “sending them as His Father sent Him^q,” He sent them with power to send others; and the constitution of His Church, with His assurance to its ministers that He would be “with them always, even unto the end of the world^r,” evinces that He expected they would do so. The Pastors of His Church are then His “ambassadors,” representatives in “Christ’s stead^s,” acting in His name, and by His authority: and surely, “no man taketh this honour unto himself^t.” In those to whom it is given, the sacredness and dignity of their office indisputably requires that, on their foreheads, and in their hearts, and through their lives should be inscribed, “Holiness to the Lord^u.” And does it not give them a strong and sacred claim to the love, the prayers, and the respect of all Christians? “He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that re-

^p Matt. xvi. 19.

^q John xx. 21.

^r Matt. xxviii. 20.

^s 2 Cor. v. 20.

^t Heb. v. 4.

^u Exod. xxviii. 36.

ceiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me^x." The Pastors of His Church, sent successively from the Apostles to the present day, have then "the ministry of" the Christian "reconciliation^y," including in it all the promises of pardon, grace, and everlasting life, committed unto them; and while the explicit declaration of this economy to St. Peter, and conveyance accordingly, should beget in us an entire confidence in this institution of our Lord; the use we should make of the fall of the great Apostle should be, to remind us of the inspired admonition, that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us^z."

Again. From the life of St. Peter we learn, that frailty is inherent in the best of men. We are apt to look in eminent, and in sacred characters, for perfection. But it is, what was never yet found in mortal. Great worth may be acquired, high attainments may be made in virtue, in wisdom, and divine excellence. But some weakness, some heedless error, some fault or foible, will still betray, that every merely human descendant of Adam is a fallen and sinful being. What noble and lovely qualities, have we beheld in St. Peter! A thousand excellencies attach us to his character. Who was more concerned to be perfect, or better instructed in his duty than he? Did he not seem firm in his station, as the rugged oak, defying every blast? Yet a light breeze laid him prostrate, shorn of his glory! Where he felt strongest, his weakness was betrayed. He fell where he thought himself most secure. If he, great and good as he was, erred, in whom shall we look for perfection? If the cedars of Libanus have been shaken, what have we not to fear for the

^x Matt. x. 40.

^y 2 Cor. v. 18.

^z Ibid. iv. 7.

hyssop on our walls? Do we, then, discern imperfections in our fellows? Let us remember, that we, like them, are men, and may as greatly err. Is there not that entire rectitude and holiness in the ministers of the altar, which we expect? Let not their office, nor Christianity suffer neglect, contempt, nor blame. Cover their failings, or look on them with holy grief, and remember that St. Peter was unfortunate. Let not the errors which we find in any of our race, disparage their good qualities. With sorrow behold, with tenderness reprove, the frailties of each other; for there is none “that doeth good, and sinneth not^a.”

Further. The history we have been contemplating suggests to us that one frail step should not consign a man to blame and neglect; that he who has erred may yet be good and useful. The chief labours of St. Peter, the noblest honours he gathered, his best services to his Master and the world, were after the odious event which stained his character. Had he been reprobated at once for his fault; had he been abandoned by his Lord; had he been left to himself, to his shame, and to his iniquity, what a valuable character might have been lost to the world, what valuable exertions might have been lost to Christianity! But his Lord was wise, and kind as well as just. The look which drew his tears raised also hope and resolution to retrieve his virtue. He “wept^b;” was forgiven; and became the means of bringing thousands to eternal life. This instance speaks an affecting lesson to mankind. How many men condemned by society for one mishap; how many friends discarded by their inmates for one folly; how many children abandoned by their parents for one misconduct—have “wept” their miseries and

^a Eccles. vii. 20.

^b Matt. xxvi. 75.

their faults in vain; sunk in despair and become wholly criminal. Pardonable should the first error always be. Yea, “seventy times seven^c,” if the offender turn repentant, should he be forgiven. Would we learn the proper aspect of reprehension? Look at the Saviour’s eye when it fell upon St. Peter; catch, if it be possible, but part of its expression. It may recover, while it reproveth the offending son, or brother, or friend.

Lastly. From this narrative, let us learn the forbearance and tenderness of our Lord. If He forgave St. Peter his denial of Him in the hour of distress, honoured him with excellent gifts, and made him great in His kingdom, what may not every penitent, humble offender hope from His love? Does the Lord by trials, by afflictions, by perplexities, seem to look angrily upon you? Be assured, they are reproofs for your good. Call to mind your imperfections. Bewail your unfaithfulness. Devote yourselves to Him anew, with full purpose of amendment of life. Then shall His strength be perfected in your weakness. Instead of the reproveth eye, the healing light of His countenance shall be lifted up upon you. Like the great Apostle in the text, you “will go from strength to strength,” till “unto the God of gods^d” you appear with him covered with the righteousness of your Redeemer, and partakers of everlasting glory.

^c Matt. xviii. 22.

^d Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

SERMON LXIII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

ST. MATTHEW, ix. 9.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom : and He saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed Him.

“ My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord^a.” Possessing sovereign freedom to do as He pleases, and guided by infinite wisdom, which sees the end and consequences of things, He oft times acts for reasons, incomprehensible to us, in ways which seem mysterious. In the dispensation of favours, frequently to our narrow sight He appears to act with an unequal hand. And in the selection of instruments for the accomplishment of His purposes, frequently to our finite judgments He chooses such as seem unsuitable and unworthy. But “ known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world^b :” and the issue of them all, to the astonishment of our ignorance, is glorious, wise, and beneficial. A singular instance of this truth we have in the selection of St. Matthew to the sacred, important, and honourable

^a Is. lv. 8.

^b Acts xv. 18.

post which he filled. It is an eminent display of the sovereignty of His grace, and a wise part of His economy in the promulgation of the Gospel.

There have come down to us but few particulars of this great Apostle and Evangelist. The parts of his life which are known, are clear and important; they ought to be remembered and understood, as fragments of a valuable antiquity. While our Church leads us to honour his memory, as one of the pillars on which her goodly fabric rests, it becomes us to be acquainted with his character and life, as far as the knowledge of them is preserved, and to avail ourselves of the instructions, which may be derived from the sober contemplation of his vocation and ministry.

The first knowledge that we have of St. Matthew, he is sitting in a toll-booth at Capernaum, upon the borders of the sea of Galilee. We learn from the other Evangelists, who speak of him by his other name, Levi, that he was the son of a certain man named Alpheus. But of the place of his nativity, his education, or character, there is no information. He was, at the time when we first hear of him, in a very lucrative, though a very iniquitous office. After the Romans had subjected the Jews, they imposed upon them many heavy tributes. The collection of these was a very profitable business; and, at first, entrusted only to Romans, and those of honourable rank. But, in process of time, it was conferred upon less worthy characters, and, at length, the Jews were permitted to buy the office; and collected with much gain taxes upon their own countrymen. Abuse soon ensued. So covetous and unjust, so abominably exorbitant, fraudulent, and cruel were they in the time of Christ, that "Publican" was a hateful term; an epithet of great opprobrium. Capernaum was

the metropolis of all Galilee, and on the sea, by which it stood, there was much passing and conveyance of merchandise: among the tax-gatherers, therefore, it is probable, that St. Matthew's situation was one of the most lucrative and eligible. How he had conducted himself in it we cannot say. He should not, however, be included in an indiscriminate censure. Possibly, he might have been honest; for in all classes of men, some that are worthy may be found. There were a "few" undefiled "names even in Sardis^d;" and on one occasion, our Saviour pronounced a humble Publican "justified^e," rather than the proud, and important Pharisee. Be this as it may, certain it is, that he was of the number of Publicans when our Saviour's eyes were turned towards him. When he received the invitation to follow the Redeemer, he was "sitting at the receipt of custom."

We have here an instance of the unlimited mercy and goodness of God. None of His fallen children are excepted in His gracious proffers of salvation. From an odious class of men, and a proverbially iniquitous employment, St. Matthew is called to be an Apostle of Christianity, and the first writer of the history of our Lord. I know not with what reason, any have considered this as an exemplification of the sovereignty of Jehovah, in absolutely and unconditionally electing to their happiness those who shall be saved. To me it would seem, that God is supreme over all His works; but that, in vouchsafing to raise conspicuously to the hopes and honours of the Gospel, those who were notoriously "dead in trespasses and sins^f," He would teach us the infinite sufficiency of His grace; and inculcate the truth, so worthy of His nature, and so consolatory to the human race, that His arms are open to receive all who will hearken

^d Rev. iii. 4.^e Luke xviii. 14.^f Eph. ii. 1.

to His voice; that ‘He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live.’ Art thou oppressed with the burden of thy iniquities? Has the path of thy life been remote from the way of God’s commandments? Under the consciousness of thy manifold sins, art thou ready to conclude that for thee there is no mercy: that thou art rejected for ever by thy God? Rouse thee from this despair. Hearken to the voice of the Son of the Highest. Arise, and leave all, and follow Him. “Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^g.” In the vocation of St. Matthew, and throughout the whole Gospel, thou art taught that Jesus “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance^h.”

The cavillers against our holy religion have, with sophistic levity, endeavoured to turn those things against it, which, by the wise and considerate, are placed among the evidences of its truth. To unbiassed reason it appears no small argument of its authenticity, that its first propagators were of the humblest and poorest class of men: so illiterate, as to have been incapable of devising such an imposture, and so destitute of wealth and power, as to have been unable by human means to obtain such wonderful success. But no, say the adversaries of the Christian faith, they were so poor as to have nothing to risk by joining themselves to Christ; and so ignorant, as to have been liable to credulity and deception. In the method of propagating the Gospel, wonderfully has God condescended to the perverseness of men. What will these objectors to the illiterateness of the primitive disciples say, when Saul of Tarsus, a man of profound understanding, and

^g Is. i. 18.

^h Matt. ix. 13.

accomplished in all the learning of his age, is found bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus? What will these cavillers at the poverty of the first preachers of Christianity object, when the Apostle of this day is observed among them? He was taken from a sect so obnoxious to the hatred of the Jews, that no impostor would have selected his coadjutors from it. He had wealth to lose, and a very valuable employment. And from his great intercourse with men, from his success in procuring his appointment to office, and from his preservation and exercise of it in so populous a place, it is reasonable to conclude that he was not destitute of prudence, or understanding. But to the call of Christ his ears were open. As his poorer and more illiterate brethren left their friends and risked their safety, so he abandoned his office and its emoluments, he left all, “arose, and followed Him.”

Here we are not obliged to suppose, that St. Matthew divested himself of all his possessions. It is not the office of religion, to strip men of the blessings which the Most High may have given them. We find him, indeed, receiving Christ afterwards in his own house, and making an entertainment for Him and his friends. But we are to suppose that he relinquished all covetous inclinations; that he relinquished an office abounding with temptations, and iniquities; that he relinquished all attachment to ill-gotten wealth, and was ready, if required, to devote all to the service of his Lord. And to similar conduct is every Christian called. Father, or mother, he may not love more than the Redeemer. If his “right hand offend him,” he will “cut it off, and cast it from himⁱ.” Whatever in his disposition or pursuits is opposed to the holiness of the Gospel, he

ⁱ Matt. v. 30.

will sacrifice to the will of that Being, who gave Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world. You will not, therefore, deem it impertinent, if I beseech you, as Christians, to consider this conduct of St. Matthew, as calculated to impress on you the necessity of removing from your bosoms, those covetous desires of the pomps and vanities of life, and that inordinate love of riches, which would lead you to pursue them in any way, or by any means, which are incompatible with the precepts, or the spirit of the Gospel.

To return to the narrative. It has appeared to some strange and incredible, that St. Matthew should, upon so sudden a command, have quitted his gainful occupation, and with such ready obedience have followed a person with whom he had no acquaintance. These difficulties will vanish upon a recollection of facts, and of the power of the Spirit of God.

It is hardly supposable, that the Apostle had heard nothing of Christ, and been wholly ignorant of His doctrine, before He called him to His service. The Publicans*, we know, were generally curious to hear Him, and in the synagogues and streets of Capernaum He had frequently taught. From His terrible denunciation against this city, it should seem too, that here He had wrought many of His most mighty, and convincing miracles. “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day^k.” It is evident from this, that most satisfactory evidences of His Divine

* Why may not St. Matthew have been one of the Publicans mentioned by St. Luke, (ch. iii. 12) who came to the Baptist, to be baptized?—*Ed.*

^k Matt. xi. 23.

authority had been exhibited in this place. Can it, then, be likely that an inhabitant, whose business was in the city with all descriptions of people, should have heard nothing of these discourses, and seen none of these works? It is a much more probable supposition, that St. Matthew had heard the doctrines of Christ, and witnessed the wonderful testimonials of His mission which were daily exhibited, before he was called to be His disciple.

There is no difficulty, however, in supposing, that for extraordinary purposes, the Almighty should sometimes act without the ordinary means. Hath not God the hearts of all men in His hands, and may He not turn them even as He will? Hath He not access to the minds which He hath created, and may He not convey to them such truth as He pleases? When He would select to Himself a peculiar people, could He “by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm,” take them from the midst of another people¹; and can He not, when He would select an individual for His service, take him by the power of His Spirit from darkness to light? There is nothing unreasonable in the opinion, that, if the occasion required it, the Almighty would supernaturally incline St. Matthew to His will. Upon either supposition, we are to refer to the Holy Spirit the Publican’s sanctification. It was unquestionably through the aid, and under the blessing of the Comforter, that he received and fulfilled his ministry.

But it is necessary, that I should here caution you against an unhappy perversion of this interesting case. There is danger in the present day, that it may be made promotive of spiritual delusion. The first age of the Gospel was an age of miracles. Though God, even then, did not act without regard

¹ Deut. iv. 34.

to the nature of men, He, nevertheless, for the conviction of the world, vouchsafed many extraordinary manifestations of His power and Spirit. But now that the economy of the Gospel is established, and the ways and means pointed out by which men are to secure the salvation of their souls; I know not that any have more reason to expect extraordinary influences upon their minds, than they have to expect a light from heaven shining round about them, as it did about St. Paul; or to hear the miraculous voice which he heard, speaking audibly from the skies. God dealeth with us according to the nature He hath given us, and the condition in which we are placed. He hath given us “the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation^m.” His Spirit, indeed, must accompany His word to render it effectual in our hearts. But this Spirit, I conceive, operates as silently, as the orbs of heaven are moved in their spheres by the power of His invisible hand. Guard, therefore, against mistaking the glow of animal feelings for a spiritual sensibility. Guard assiduously against mistaking the illusions of fancy for the motions of the Holy Ghost. God seldom does that in a supernatural way, for the accomplishment of which He hath appointed effectual means, and established regular laws. Enter into covenant with Him by the rite which He hath ordained. Learn by the light of His word the whole system of your duties. By prayer and an attendance upon His institutions, seek the aid of His Spirit, to enable you to perform His will. With vigilant circumspection, and unwearied diligence endeavour that the means be effectual. In this plain and reasonable course “be faithful unto death;” and the immutable Author of the everlasting covenant, will not fail to “give you a crown of lifeⁿ.”

^m 2 Tim. iii. 15.

ⁿ Rev. ii. 10.

We turn again to the highly favoured Publican, and behold him enrolled among the Apostles of our Lord. Doubtless, he was not deficient in his services; but with the eleven spent his time and strength, in spreading the glad tidings of salvation to all people. One special service it was his happiness to perform for the Church and the world, which reflects a peculiar glory upon his memory, and endears it to all the faithful. The first and most complete biography of our blessed Lord was from his pen. The Divine Spirit employed his hand to record the events and doctrines, in which all posterity was interested, and the knowledge of which is destined, in the fulness of time, to become "the joy of the whole earth." Written in a time of persecution to support and establish the Jewish converts, as well as to convey to posterity the life and instructions of the Redeemer of the world, it abounds with consolatory facts and remarks; it notices with peculiar exactness, the fulfilment of the prophecies in the various events of our Saviour's life: and it contains the most awful and sublime particulars of the day of the coming of the Son of Man. Such a treasure of wisdom and comfort for the heathen sages would have pressed to their bosoms. You, my friends, will not allow yourselves to be unacquainted with the excellent gift; and should you desire the aid of other men's thoughts, permit me to recommend to you the Lectures upon it, delivered by the pious and exemplary Bishop of London*.

Of the latter days of St. Matthew, time has spared no indubitable records. What was his fate; whether he suffered martyrdom; at what age; where, and in what manner; are points, however interesting, which are involved in uncertainty. But, whatever were

* Ps. xlviii. 2.

* Dr. Beilby Porteus.

his other services and end, let us adore the extent of the Divine mercy, and honour the memory of the man, who laid the foundation of the Gospel history. From his ready obedience to the call of Christ, let us learn the propriety of not delaying to comply with the same invitation, which in His word is given to us and to all men; "Follow me." By considering the station and employment, from which he was called, let us learn, that there is no condition which the grace of God may not reach, and therefore view with pity and compassion the unfortunate wanderers in the paths of iniquity. And, above all, by advert- ing to that holy zeal and Christian benevolence, with which in an age of persecution he furnished the lead- ing narrative of our Saviour's life, let us be prompted to a lively concern for the welfare of the Church, and to such a communication of the light and comfort which we have received, as may lead others to re- joice in the same holy faith. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever^p."

^p Dan. xii. 3.

SERMON LXIV.

ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. JOHN THE
EVANGELIST.

ST. JOHN, xiii. 23.

*Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples,
whom Jesus loved.*

THERE is something so interesting in the situation of the person here introduced; and so high an honour is attached to his character by this picturesque mention of him, that we at once inquire who he was. Though his name is not mentioned, circumstances sufficiently prove that the enviable description belongs to St. John, to whose memory the Church has consecrated this day. Happy Evangelist, to be permitted to recline with affectionate fondness, upon the bosom of thy Lord; and have thy name transmitted to posterity, as emphatically "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

But, how did St. John attain to such peculiar favour? Was there any thing in him above the rest of mankind, that the blessed Redeemer, who inculcated and manifested an universal charity viewed him with such a partial regard? Surely, the wise and equitable Jesus never felt a blind fondness for any individual. What were the qualities which procured for this His friend the singular happiness

of His special affection? The answer to these questions will be the Evangelist's best and proper eulogium, and may lead us to some useful reflections.

A peculiarly amiable disposition, with an ardent and faithful attachment to his Lord, appear to have been properties, for which St. John was distinguished, above the other disciples.

From all that we can learn of him, he was a character whom it would have been impossible not to have loved. There was in his nature that attractive union of a modest, benevolent heart, with a luminous and devout mind, with which those who know how to feel and appreciate excellence, are always captivated. Benevolence was the predominant trait of his character; not a romantic feeling, an effeminate principle, alive to artificial grief, but insensible to the real sufferings of men; concerned for those who are out of its reach, but thoughtless of the claims of those who are about it. It was a meek, yet manly benevolence, defined as to its objects, and practical in its operation. It was that benevolence which makes the life amiable; which feels, and pities when it feels; which carries itself with a winning sweetness towards every being, and finds its congenial pleasure in doing good. Of this excellent principle his heart was the seat. This divine virtue formed his soul. His nature glowed with that spirit of heavenly kindness which views all creatures with complacence or compassion; and in the happiness of others finds its own. In all his writings this spirit is found. His Epistles, which are written from the heart, and, therefore, are the best evidences of his character, glow with such an enlightened, pure, and tender charity, that it is impossible any person, in whom the last remains of goodness are not extinguished, should not be made better by reading them. They show him formed to

love, and to be loved. In no other writings is there such a luminous benevolence. In truth, his joy, his life, his darling theme to his death was love.

It appears that St. John had deeply contemplated the Divine nature, and the fruits of his study manifest, that his soul was capacious and devout, as well as benevolent. We nowhere find such exalted views of the Divine perfection, and such explicit statements of the mysteries of the Godhead, as in those parts of Scripture which are the productions of his pen. He must have been by nature amiable. But religion had, doubtless, improved the good dispositions which nature had given him. It was, in all probability, his acquaintance with God, and particularly his habitual contemplation of the Divine goodness, and of the operation of it in the salvation of men, which filled him with that spirit for which he was conspicuous, and raised him to a degree of excellence, which few mortals have attained. That he was evidently devout is evident, not only from his great attainments in the knowledge of God's truth, and from the pious fervour which pervades many of his writings, but also from the habits of his life. We find him in the city, going up to the temple daily at the hour of prayer; and when he was an exile in the Isle of Patmos, though solitary and afflicted, "he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day^a."

Such a person as we have been contemplating, could not but have loved the transcendent character of Jesus Christ. Congenial spirits will attract each other. Nor is it imputing selfishness to our Saviour to suppose, that He was influenced by the Evangelist's attachment, in admitting him to His intimate friendship. It seems to be a law of eternal equity,

^a Rev. i. 9, 10.

that a man who would have friends, “ must show himself friendly ^b,” and the most disinterested Being avows that “ He will love them that love Him ^c.”

That the Evangelist discovered an ardent attachment to Christ, there can be no doubt. The mild, the pure, the benevolent, the divine Redeemer, could not but have been loved by one, who, gentle by nature, when he had been filled by grace, was so much like his Lord. All that He was, and did, and taught, is calculated to obtain the homage of good minds, and an indifference to the loveliness of His character is among the surest evidences of corruption of heart. A disposition, like St. John’s, would readily yield to the impression of such transcendent excellence. The position in which we see him in the text, is not more indicative of the Master’s partiality, than of the disciple’s love. It is indeed, to the ardour of his attachment, that candour will attribute his unguarded expression concerning the Samaritans; the only instance of severity in his life, a severity, which nothing but the exalted mercy and Divine forbearance of the Son of God would have impeached. As this great friend of all mankind passed through Samaria, the ungrateful Samaritans refused Him the common civilities of humanity. Wounded to the quick by this disregard of his Lord, the disciple would have called down fire from heaven to destroy them. In this one instance his zeal outstripped his benevolence. It served to show, that he was mortal; and manifested, that even to the loved disciple, the humble Jesus was superior ^d.

There was a fidelity, as well as ardour in the attachment of this disciple to his Lord, in which no other disciple equalled him. Constancy marked his

^b Prov. xviii. 24.

^c Ibid. viii. 17.

^d Luke ix. 51—56.

love. When our Saviour was hurried to judgment, his companions forsook Him, or followed to deny Him ; but St. John, with generous courage, went in with Him to see the end. It was a dismaying end ; but we find him at the foot of the cross, a mournful spectator, when we look in vain, for any one of his compeers. On the morn of the resurrection, he left even the zealous St. Peter behind him, though they set out together ; so great was his desire to be at the sepulchre of his Lord, if, haply, any good had betided Him. There is no truth more certain, than that the amiable virtues are connected. His uniform tenderness and genuine benevolence, his modesty and piety, were pledges of his faithfulness as a friend. He adhered to his Master when the rest failed. His attachment seems to have been such, as danger could not dismay, nor adversity interrupt, nor any thing destroy. To whom, indeed, but to one, whose known fidelity furnished ground for the most entire confidence in him, would our Saviour have committed the beloved mother whom He had honoured in life, and was about to leave in the world, pierced through with many sorrows. “ When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son ! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother ° ! ” What an expression of confidence ! What a tribute to the Evangelist’s worth ! Who can forbear to envy the disciple this testimony of his Lord’s regard ? His subsequent conduct verified all that has been said of his amiableness and fidelity : for, transferring his affection for his Master to the object who was dear to Him, and scrupulously obedient to His wishes, he “ from that hour took ” the disconsolate mother “ unto his own home.”

° John xix. 26, 27.

Many were the trials and sufferings, to which he was exposed after his Master's ascension. But, with a firmness of faith, which neither crosses, nor exile, nor the boiling cauldron, nor all that angry power threatened could bend, he maintained the religion of Jesus; writing a gospel, that it might be preserved in its integrity, and ready at all times, to seal it with his blood. In short, he merited not less by his character and conduct, than by his office, the title with which his name has descended, of "the Divine." Amiable, modest, enlightened, benevolent, devout, ardent in his attachment, pure in his affection, capable of confidence and fidelity, he appears to have been formed by grace, to be the bosom friend of the Saviour of mankind.

To this high privilege and happiness was he raised. His sweet disposition, his amiable deportment, his enlarged soul, his piety and purity, rendered him more like his Master, than any other of the disciples; and, aided by his ardent attachment and devoted zeal, in all probability, procured him that place in the bosom of Christ, with which he was honoured. The Redeemer felt for him not a transient, nor superficial partiality. It was an union of His heart with that of "the disciple whom He loved." That this happy favourite was admitted to intimacies of the most endearing nature, is evident from St. Peter's beckoning to him, to obtain an answer to the solemn question, which all feared to ask. He occupied the place of honour, and leaned in the posture of innocent affection upon Jesus' breast, when they were together. He was one of the chosen three, whom Christ took with Him to the interesting scene of His transfiguration on Mount Tabor, and to the tremendous scene of His agony in the garden. To him, as we have noticed, was committed the dearest pledge which Christ left

on earth, in the most affecting hour of His earthly existence. And it was he, who was honoured with those mysterious revelations, which wrapt in their wonderful folds, all the purposes of God towards His Church. As if his character and qualities rendered him peculiarly fitted to recommend the Gospel to the world, he was continued on earth long after all his fellow Apostles slept in the dust; and in compensation for his long separation from his beloved friend, was favoured with visions and divine communications, and made the honoured instrument of singular service in His cause. He is said to have died Bishop of Ephesus, at the venerable age of an hundred years, exhibiting to the last that sweetness of disposition, and all those estimable qualities, for which Jesus loved him. There is a tradition in the Church, that when the infirmities of age forbad him to make long discourses, he contented himself with repeating to those who heard him, that great lesson of his Master, the new commandment of the Christian scheme, “ Love one another ^f.”

Such was St. John, whom, if it were permitted us to desire the felicity in which another, better than ourselves, was made happy, the Christian might, perhaps, with more propriety, envy, than any other being of the human race,—“ the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

From what has been said, we may learn, in the first place, that our religion is not hostile to those precious pleasures, which are derived from individual friendship. Our Lord had His particular friend. From the circle of His disciples, He chose one congenial person, to whom He opened His bosom, and whom He loved with an especial regard. It did not interfere with that general benevolence, which is

^f John xv. 12, 17.

due to all men. Every human being had a proper portion of His regard ; the claims of none were overlooked ; all His extraordinary affection for His friend was a surplus of love. It was so coincident with the inclination of feeling minds, to seek the joys which friendship only yields, that to have left it unauthorized by His religion, would have been a great disparagement. Unauthorized, did I say? May we not say that He has recommended it? Is not His example as holy as His precepts? What could have induced Him to prefer one course of virtuous conduct to another, but to point out the way in which we may enjoy the greatest happiness, and attain to the highest degree of excellence of which our nature is susceptible? That a friendship such as religion approves is indisputably useful, precious, and oftentimes salutary, is the advice on which we rely. Animating and promotive of noble imitation are the excellencies of a friend. How operative is respect for his opinion, in restraining one from any thing which his virtue would reprove! How favourable is his sympathy, in the day of sorrow, to our peace and resignation! That it contributes to the happiness of life, who needs be told? It is a boon, which every person can estimate. Its pleasures are confessedly the purest, and most exquisite of any on this side heaven. We may not therefore hesitate, I conceive, to believe that our Saviour encourages by His example the cultivation of a virtue so favourable to the happiness and improvement of those, whom He delights to guide into the paths of bliss. And how amiable does He appear in thus entering into the feelings of men! What a commendation does this give to His Gospel! Surely, the religion is sublime, and must have the happiness of men for its end, which, while it incul-

cates an universal charity, excludes not its disciples from the pure felicity of an individual friendship, which multiplies all our joys by sharing them, and, by dividing, lessens every woe.

But, to avail ourselves rightly of this liberty, we must learn from our subject, what are the qualities, for which we should look in those, whom we admit to our closest intimacy. A good friend is not easily found. The bliss of this treasure is rarely enjoyed on earth. Led on by feeling, overpowered by good nature, captivated by flattery, infatuated by some single excellence, men often fall into such friendships, as are inconstant as fortune's smiles, and end in bitterness. Would you have a friend who will be sincere and useful; whom you may trust to enter into your bosom, and participate all your thoughts; who will be faithful to your happiness; stand unaltered in his attachment when adversity assails you; and by his advice, his sympathy, his example, and his tender reproof, be to you a treasure beyond all price:—guard against the malignant, the envious, and the immoral. Be not caught with splendid vices. Seek the heart which is formed to benevolence, and hallowed by religion's purifying influence. The value of the acquisition will repay the most active caution. To be secure from disappointment, choose such a character as “Jesus loved.”

Again. We may learn from the subject we have contemplated, how we may, with certainty, obtain the favour and approbation of our great Redeemer. To please Him is surely our desire. If, as we have lately commemorated, He left the bosom of His Father to visit us for our salvation; to be indifferent to His pleasure must argue the basest insensibility. Now we have seen what the qualities were, which He admired in the beloved disciple. He is un-

changeable in His affections, “ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ^g.” What once pleased Him, He will always approve. To the amiable virtues, which obtained for St. John His appropriate affection, He will always give His partial regard. Cultivate, then, the kind and benevolent disposition, which the Gospel commends, and be ardent and faithful in your attachment to your Lord. Be meek and modest; pure and devout; and the happiness, which you envy the Evangelist, may be your own.

Once more. We may learn from the history of St. John both charity and humility. “ Why callest thou Me good ?” with scrutinizing solemnity said Jesus Christ, “ there is none good but one, that is, God ^h.” And in vain shall we look for perfection, in any of our friends, or in any earthly being. What am I going to disclose to you? Three times was the beloved disciple obnoxious to his Saviour’s reproof:—when, influenced no doubt in some degree, though probably not entirely by his mother, he sought to sit on the right hand of his Master in His kingdom, and received the answer, “ ye know not what ye ask ⁱ :”—when, in an hour of passion, he would have imprecated vengeance upon those who did wrong, and was told, “ ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ^k :”—and when, in the garden, during the agony of his Master, (alas, for the infirmity of our nature!) with St. Peter and St. James, St. John also fell asleep. “ The spirit,” said Jesus, “ indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak ^l.” Learn hence, not to expect faultlessness in your fellow beings; and, especially, to bear with, to cover, and to excuse the imperfections of your friends. Though

^g Heb. xiii. 8.

^h Matt. xix. 17.

ⁱ Mark x. 38.

^k Luke ix. 55.

^l Matt. xxvi. 41.

Jesus had occasion thrice to reprove St. John, he was, nevertheless, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” “Admonish a friend, it may be he hath not done it: and if he have done it, that he do it no more. Admonish thy friend, it may be he hath not said it: and if he have, that he speak it not again. Admonish a friend: for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale. There is one that slippeth in his speech, but not from his heart; and who is he that hath not offended with his tongue^m?”

But you are ready to say, if we could have been partakers of St. John’s privileges, we should, at least, be happier, if not worthier of his Master’s love. And this leads me to observe, finally, that of the peculiar privileges, with which the beloved disciple was blest, we may virtually partake. Would you be witnesses of the scenes, to which the chosen three were admitted? On the wings of faith you may ascend the heavenly Tabor, and contemplate the glory of your Lord, and Moses, and Elias, the Fathers and the Prophets, there talking with Him. In the hour of meditation, you may go into the garden, and ponder the agony which your Redeemer sustained, with better intelligence, and livelier concern, than they possessed, whose eyes, because of the hour, and the fatigues of the day, and the power of darkness, were unhappily weary. Is it the happiness of “leaning on Jesus’ bosom,” that you desire? Of this you may, in some degree, participate, by casting your cares upon Him; by resting your spirits upon His merits and intercession, when you are oppressed with the consciousness of your weakness; and, by pouring out to Him in faithful confidence your sorrows, your wishes, and your fears. But, perhaps, it is his legacy which you envy the

^m Eccles. xix. 13—16.

distinguished St. John. You are ready to resolve that your joys and faithfulness would be unspeakable, could you have had the mother of Him who died for you, committed by her Son to your care. Amazing wisdom of the economy of Christ! Of this satisfaction you may partake; of the sincerity of this resolution you may give evidence, by bestowing your compassion and kindness upon any of the members of His family, especially when, like His bereaved parent, they are in affliction, poverty and distress. For what is the record which "the Spirit of Truth" hath made? Hear the words, and engrave them, as the sacred incitement to the best and most profitable deeds of Christians, on the tablets of your bosoms: "He stretched forth his hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother °."

^a John xiv. 17.

^o Matt. xii. 49, 50.

SERMON LXV.

ON THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

2 ST. PETER, ii. 15.

Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

IN the course which the Church directs for publicly reading the Holy Scriptures, we are, at this period, brought to a very interesting, singular, and instructive piece of sacred history. The story of Balaam attracts our attention by the matter to which it relates, the ancient customs with which it is interspersed, and the strangeness and wickedness of his conduct, whom it more particularly exhibits to our view. In this celebrated diviner we behold an extraordinary mixture of just sentiment with perverse practice; right apprehensions of God with direct opposition to His will; seeming piety and inspiration with diabolical purposes and disgraceful instability. It is a character necessary to be studied; not only that we may derive instruction from it, but also that we may perceive the justness of the censure, passed upon him in the Gospel, and not be led, by the occasional appearance of propriety in his expressions and behaviour, to think him less criminal than he is represented. For so wise and prudent, so pious and just, does he seem to be in particular

passages, that the cursory reader may be ready to exclaim, Wherefore is he blamed? how cautious his steps! how sublime his visions! Examination is necessary to understand his character. When we have well observed it, we shall be struck with its inconsistency and baseness; and wonder that he ever possessed a virtuous sentiment, or cherished a holy habit in his bosom. To mark it, as it opens upon us in the sacred narrative; to trace its peculiarities to their cause, and to show its awful termination, will be leading objects of this discourse: in which we will take the inspired St. Peter for our monitor, and rely upon Thee, Thou 'Giver of all good gifts*,' for assistance and an improving blessing.

The occasion of Balaam's being introduced was the arrival of the Israelites upon the plains of Moab. Dismayed by their numbers and fame, by the wonders which had marked their footsteps out of Egypt, and the destruction which they poured upon their foes, and particularly by their recent, terrifying conquest of the Amorites, and powerful King of Basan; the Moabites trembled at their approach. They consulted with the elders of Midian about the common safety, and their mutual communications were a striking accomplishment of the prediction of Moses, that the nobles of Edom, and mighty ones of Moab, should be dismayed by the greatness of the Divine arm, in delivering His people^a.

Something was to be done for defence, against this mighty company which devoured all before it, "as the ox licketh up the grass of the field^b." It was an important part of ancient warfare to seek the influence of the gods, and imprecate the foe. In the Greek and Roman classics, there are traces of

* Prayer in the Ember Weeks.

^a Exod. xv. 15.

^b Numb. xxii. 4.

this custom ; and it appears to have been prevalent among most of the heathen nations. They were wont, before going to battle, to endeavour, by sacrifices and oblations, to enlist on their side their own and foreign gods, and by the imprecations of some priest or magician, to devote the enemy to destruction. Being a worshipper of Chemosh, and credulous in these vain superstitions, it was the first care of the King of Moab, to send for a diviner to “ curse the people .” He hoped that thus, with the aid of his sword, he should be able to prevail against them, and drive them out of the land.

Accordingly, messengers were sent, with the presents which were customary on such occasions, to Balaam, the son of Beor, or Bosor, a celebrated diviner who dwelt in Mesopotamia, to invite him to Moab on this absurd business. From all that we can learn of Balaam, it appears, that he was an acknowledger of the true God. In many parts of the heathen world, there were instances of persons, who, though they were not Israelites by birth, or profession, gathered from the rubbish of Paganism some decaying fragments of the knowledge, which was diffused through the world at the dispersion from Babel, and in various ways renewed by the economy of Divine Providence : which fragments furnished them with an imperfect sentiment of the one, supreme, eternal, Being. As it was in this part of Mesopotamia, that Abraham dwelt before his removal to Canaan ; and here that Jacob and most of his sons, once had a residence ; it is less surprising to find here some traces of true religion, some inconstant remembrance of the true God. Be this as it may, it is certain, that we find Balaam speaking of the Lord Jehovah as his God, and ac-

knowledging His supremacy over the minds and affairs of men. There is, also, reason to suppose, that he was one, to whom the Most High had vouchsafed to make some special communications. He had clear notions of being met by God; felt a confidence which must have been grounded upon past experience, that when he should inquire of Jehovah, he should obtain a revelation; and, indeed, is expressly styled a Prophet, in the context, and other parts of the sacred volume. It would seem, too, from some of his expressions to Balak and his messengers, that he had a sense of the supremacy of the Divine will, and of his obligation to observe God's commands. Such is the fair side of Balaam's character; an acknowledger of the true God, admitted to the privileges of a Prophet, and blest with a just view of the paramount authority of the Divine injunctions. How promising the appearance! Who would not expect in him a blameless conduct? But alas! sad instance of the corruption of our nature, and of the ease with which vice, when it is fostered in the bosom, undermines the power of truth and virtue! we shall presently find him, abandoning his God, his character, and duty, for his pride and covetousness; and to gratify these insatiate passions, proving a traitor to every good feeling, and a patron of the basest iniquity.

But why, it may here be asked, did not Balak seek a diviner among the worshippers of his own gods? Why did he send for one to Mesopotamia, and for one who acknowledged the God of his enemies? This has, by some, been explained by the supposition, that he believed the strength of the Israelites depended on the power of their God, and that Balaam would induce Him to withdraw His influence, or turn it against them. Shocking as this notion may appear to us, it may have been enter-

tained by Balak. So lost were the heathen idolaters to all just apprehensions of the Deity, that they readily believed the friendship of the gods might be bought with sacrifices and honours. We may find the Romans, once and again, most solemnly employed, when making an attack upon a city, in endeavouring to induce its tutelary deities to abandon it, and become the friends of the besiegers. Balak may have adopted similar notions and from the same principles have called Balaam from “the mountains of the east^d.”

It is not, however, absolutely necessary to resort to this supposition. Balak may have been influenced by the greatness of Balaam’s fame, to prefer him before any other diviner. That his reputation as a soothsayer was renowned, and that the King of Moab had great confidence in it, is evident from the language in which he addressed him: “I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed^e.” Either he had formerly prophesied only as he was authorized by his God, and the unfailing fulfilment of such predictions had acquired him renown; or he had been led by his covetousness to abuse his office, and taking advantage of the reverence for astrology in the country in which he dwelt, had become eminent among those who used curious arts, and prophesied for gain.

We are sorry to find, in returning to the narrative, that this last conjecture is the most probable. The messengers arrived, delivered their errand, and were ordered to tarry all night, that he might consult with the Lord. The Most High anticipated the Prophet, and demanded who the men were that were come to him. Upon his relating the facts, he received these plain and positive instructions; “Thou

^d Numb. xxiii. 7.

^e Ibid. xxii. 6.

shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed^f.” Whether he was to be blamed, for hearkening at all to the request and proffers of Balak, as some have supposed, or not, thus much is indisputable, he had now a clear knowledge of the Divine will, and, unless he believed God to be variable, or esteemed gain better than obedience, should have, henceforth, held no further communications upon the disapproved subject.

The answer, imperfectly reported to Balak, produced in him only the opinion, that the temptations he had offered were not sufficiently great, and he immediately despatched a more noble embassy, with richer gifts and unlimited promises. His pride elated, and his covetousness inflamed, Balaam looks upon the honours and wealth which he might acquire; and doubts whether he may not be indulged. How fatal is the first hesitation of virtue! He who turns not instantly from vice, but stops to view her baits, and listen to her charms, gives himself to danger, and will generally be ensnared. She is like the wily serpent, which, if he once catch the eye of the unwary bird, rivets it to himself, and with well guided glances, infatuating the poor victim, lures it to a nearer and nearer approach, till, unable any longer to withstand the action of the fascinating spell, it rushes willingly to irresistible destruction. How fortunate for Balaam if he had, at once, refused to listen to the proposals of these messengers from Balak! He knew the Divine will was opposed to them. “Thou shalt not go;—the people are blessed^g;” could hardly have ceased to sound in his ears. Why then does he tamper with the proffers of iniquity? why stand a moment on forbidden ground? His heart is set upon the wealth of Moab

^f Numb. xxii. 12.

^g Ibid. xxii. 12.

and the obeisance of its princes; and, though acquainted already with the will of the Almighty, he desires the messengers to abide all night, hoping that it might be changed. How affrontive this presumption! How dishonourable to the holy and immutable God! What wonder that the Deity was almost ready to leave the headstrong man to his way, and since he preferred his own wishes to his Maker's will, bade him follow his inclination if he pleased. This is the import of the Almighty's words. The permission he received to go was rather a merited abandonment to his own guidance. But he feels not the awful nature of this abandonment. He rashly resolves to follow his desire. Though slow to comply with the mandates of infinite wisdom, nothing can surpass his obedience to the passions of his own bosom. He rises early in the morning, saddles his ass, and is immediately on the road to Moab. So voluntary a disregard of His known pleasure, in one so favoured and well informed, justly excited the anger of the Most High. Still with parental solicitude, He went out to check him in his course. He stood in the way, in the person of His Angel, with a brandished sword, to impede his career. But intent only upon reaching the place, and gaining the promised rewards, he saw not this minister of mercy and judgment, till "the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the Prophet^h."

It is the curse of covetousness, that it cramps every expansive effort of the mind, and petrifies the heart. When it is united with pride, cruelty is always the offspring of the pair, and frequently the associates of his parents. Twice had the harmless beast, on which Balaam rode, turned from the path

^h 2 Pet. ii. 16.

of danger, and twice, with cruel and more cruel blows, been forced back. Brought to a situation in which she could neither turn because of the narrowness of the way, nor advance because of the angel, she fell to the ground beneath her impatient rider. Enraged and blind, he beats the faithful beast with unrelenting blows, and instead of having his passion cooled by her sufferings, wishes only that "there were a sword in his hand, that now he might kill her¹." How seldom is one evil passion alone in a bosom! How awful is any one at its height! When several are raging at the same time, what will they not make of man! How fallen is Balaam from the divine image in which man was created! How unlike the merciful God! And who could expect tender mercies to his beast from one, who, to gratify his covetousness and ambition, was posting gladly to a distant place, to devote, as far as in him lay, a whole nation of fellow men to destruction?

God hath a care for all His creatures. He who maketh the "ox to know his owner^k," and teacheth "the swallow the time of her coming^l"; He who formed man's mouth, and confounded all speech at Babel, He, even the Almighty Lord of all creatures, espoused the cause of the injured beast, and gave her power to utter her complaint, and at the same time opened the eyes of the rider to his danger and folly. At sight of the Angel he fell; and heard how he owed his life to the animal he had so inhumanly abused. "Unless the ass had turned from me, surely now I had slain thee and saved her alive^m."

Surely the Prophet will now see the folly of his

^l Numb. xxii. 29.

¹ Jer. viii. 7.

^k Is. i. 3.

^m Numb. xxii. 33.

conduct. Surely he will immediately return to his home. Surprising perseverance! We hear no such resolution; we see no gratitude for his preservation, nor any returning step. There is nothing but a declaration of his readiness to go back, couched in such terms as express his willingness to go forward. "If it displease thee^a." He knew it was displeasing. This was equivocation with the Almighty. It is true, the Angel said, "Go." But, it was such a permission, as would have affected any good man like a prohibition. "Only the word which I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak^b." Balaam knew that this word had pronounced the people blessed; and was immutable, and therefore might have seen that his perseverance must be as vain, as it was disobedient. But passion is always unreasonable, and generally blind. It sees no obstacles, or thinks it can surmount them all, and thus impels its victim to danger and destruction. Now that Balaam, after all that has been said and done by the Most High; is eagerly intent upon following his own will; and neglecting his Maker's, the Deity justly gives him up to himself, and he must abide the consequences. The threatening Angel, most dreadful omen to the evil man, the threatening Angel is removed from his path. His covetousness resumes the empire of his bosom. With renewed ardour he pursues his way towards Moab, to disappointment, mortification, iniquity, and ruin. Here we shall, for the present, leave him, and this afternoon, conclude our remarks on this interesting and instructive portion of holy writ.

^aNumb. xxii. 34. ^bIbid. ver. 35.

SERMON LXVI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

2 ST. PETER, ii. 15.

Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

IN the course of our remarks, this morning, on the character of Balaam we endeavoured to show, that covetousness was the reigning vice in his heart, and that his disobedience to the known will of God was the effect of his inordinate desire of worldly gain. Our observations brought us to the very interesting scene between the ass and the Prophet, and we left him pursuing his way towards Moab. We now proceed with the sacred story.

Arrived at Moab, Balaam was met and welcomed by Balak, and brought to the royal city. With the princes of the country, he was invited by the king to a religious ceremony and feast, and on the morrow after his arrival they entered upon the strange business for which he had come. The heathen nations had, most of them, "high places" consecrated to their gods. They had generally upon them thick groves, as suited alike to their meditations, enchantments, and lewdness. To "the high places of Baal^a," the king brought his diviner, from which he might take extensive views of "Israel, abiding in his tents^b."

^a Numb. xxii. 41.

^b Ibid. xxiv. 2.

Here was a baser apostasy. It is painful to behold the Prophet blending the odious superstitions of the heathen, with the worship of the Most High; building “seven altars^c” to the Lord Jehovah upon the polluted eminences of Chemosh. Yet with all the effrontery of a man resolved, at any hazards, to accomplish his purpose, he retires from this mockery of devotion to meet God, and proclaims pharisaically, “I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram^d.” In the person of the Uncreated Angel of His Presence, the Deity appeared to him, and therefore it is said, “the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth^e.” Having received injunctions what to say, he returned to the Moabites, and found them still engaged in their profane services. With eagerness they listened to, and with disappointment heard the word. He declared his inability to do as Balak desired; and actuated by fear, or Divine impulse, instead of cursing, greatly blessed the people.

Here, one would think, all parties would have desisted; and from the sentiment with which Balaam closed his parable, would suppose he had returned to wisdom and to duty. Mindful of the honours heaped upon good old Jacob’s head; struck by the blessings entailed upon the posterity of the righteous; and convinced of the immutable love and care of the Almighty for the godly; the long relaxed chords of virtue seemed to recover tone, and he could not help exclaiming, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his^f.” An exclamation worthy of the noblest mind. But with sound principles and just sentiments, the slave of passion will often exhibit a most blameable conduct. He is

^c Numb. xxiii. 1, 14, 29.

^e Ibid. ver. 16.

^d Ibid. ver. 4.

^f Ibid. ver. 10.

drawn or driven to act against his judgment. He wishes to “die the death of the righteous,” yet he lives the life of the wicked. Still hoping a change in the Divine will; still anxious, by every exertion, to satisfy Balak; still unwilling to lose “the wages of unrighteousness;” the mad Prophet suffered himself to be carried from place to place, among the high mountains of Baal, offering upon Pisgah and Peor, and on every polluted hill, the same heterogeneous, abominable worship: as if the mind of the Almighty were not the same in all places, and could be altered by the different views which were taken of the people! “God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” He had selected this people for a blessing, and there could be “no enchantment” nor “divination against Israel.” Balaam was every time sent back to his employer, with a declaration of the happy destiny of God’s people; and every renewed attempt to obtain a curse was answered by new and sublime visions, which revealed greater, and yet greater glories which should rest upon Israel.

Though it falls not within our design to notice, particularly, the different prophecies which enliven and enrich this sacred story, it would not become us to pass unnoticed that memorable prediction, which, as the Prophet cast his eyes over the Israelites spread upon the plains of Moab, he uttered concerning the Redeemer of the world, who should come of that people. There is something in it so sublime and interesting, that I cannot resist the inclination to introduce the remarkable passage. “And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor

g Numb. xxiii. 19.

h Ibid. ver. 23.

hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said : he hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.—Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city¹.” Our minds, at the repetition of these words, immediately are turned to the Saviour at Bethlehem, whose herald to the Gentiles was a star, and to that dominion of his, which “ shall be from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth^k.” While we admire the prophecy, and rejoice in its fulfilment, how melancholy the reflection, that Balaam, with the glorious vision on his mind, was yet the slave of an idolater, and led by passion to seek the ruin of the people, from whom Christ was to come !

But to return to Balak. Anger now rages in his bosom, and he vents it upon the minion whom he had seduced. “ Flee thou to thy place : I thought to promote thee unto great honour ; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour^l.” Such hath ever been the artifice of vice, to represent the restraints of virtue as injurious shackles ; the commands of God, as obstacles to great pleasure and felicity. But “ happy is the man that feareth always^m ;” “ the integrity of the upright shall guide himⁿ.”

Frustrated in his expectations, and upbraided by his employer, what is the conduct of Balaam ? Is not “ the madness of the Prophet^o” wearied into reason ? Oh awful instance of the unreasonableness

¹ Numb. xxiv. 15—17, 19.

^l Numb. xxiv. 11.

ⁿ Prov. xi. 3.

^k Ps. lxxii. 8.

^m Prov. xxviii. 14.

^o 2 Pet. ii. 16.

of passion! There is no fixing limits to its extravagance. When once it has attained a supreme influence in the bosom, there is nothing into which it may not lead its victim. Though disappointed in his desires, Balaam's heart is yet intent upon its covetousness. He resolves to obtain "the wages of unrighteousness" by a plot, the basest that ever man designed. Decency requires that I conceal the stratagem. Suffice it to say, that, unable to alienate the Deity from His people, he resolved to effect his purpose by seducing the people from their God; and this diabolical design was to be accomplished by the sacrifice of every thing dear in one sex, and honourable in the other. The Israelites were too easily ensnared; and awful were the consequences. The wrath of the Most High was brought upon them; and a plague punished them severely for their iniquity. The Moabites, however, reaped no advantage from the sorrows of the people. Moses was ordered to march against them. With rapid strides, and dreadful destruction, he marked his way; and in the conflict which ensued, Balaam fell, the victim of his own machination, with the blood of four and twenty thousand of the Lord's people upon his head; unpitied in his death; and odious to all posterity. An example this of the veracity of that inspired and solemn apothegm; "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."^p

You have now seen, beloved brethren, the principal parts of this sacred story; and the defects and baseness of the person who is most conspicuous in it. It is very full of instruction; but time will permit me to notice only two or three of the most obvious remarks; and it must be left to reflection to furnish the rest.

^p Prov. xxix. 1.

In the first place, we are taught in this narrative, that clear principles, and even extraordinary gifts, if they be not sanctified by Divine grace to the melioration of the heart and life, are no sure criterion of merit. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal^a.” And he who turns it to no good end, would have been as well without it. In Balaam, what correctness of sentiment and extraordinary favours do we behold! But while he sees what is right, and prefers what is wrong, where are his claims to praise or reward? He is ranked with the seed of evil doers, and suffers the retribution of his accursed practices.

Again. This story forces upon our consideration, how dangerous are the hesitations of virtue; the first inclinations to deviate from the path of duty. If Balaam had been governed by the dictates of conscience, and resisted the first wishes of his fatal passion, he might have escaped his vexations and crimes, and been blessed with the death he desired. But once seduced into the devious path, he could not easily leave it, and by proceeding, as is generally the case, he became lost to all sense of duty, remonstrances of conscience, and restraints of the Divine Spirit. Check then the first inclinations to evil. When the will of God is known, wish it not changed. Do not equivocate with it a moment. Suspect yourselves, with the most anxious and vigilant observation, if in pursuit of any object whatever, you find a secret desire in your hearts to go contrary to the rule of God’s commandments.

Finally. We are taught by the meditations of this day, how deplorable is his situation who is left to the impulses of his own passions, and given up “to a reprobate mind^r.” Balaam’s danger was

^a 1 Cor. xii. 7.

^r Rom. i. 28.

never the greatest, till he was permitted to do as he pleased; and man is never in so awful a situation, as when conscience has ceased to remonstrate, and inclination is his only guide. Oh! go not, my hearers, to that measure of perverseness; advance not to that degree of obduracy; be not drawn, though the whole earth and all that it contains were the lure, into that willingness and desire to sin, which may compel the Almighty to say concerning you: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone^s." Dreadful is the condition, and wretched must be the end of that man, whom God has resolved no longer to withstand in the way, to which he hath been led persistingly to wed himself, by perverse inclination and unhallowed desire. Cherish then the admonitions of conscience. Obey the restraints of the Almighty. Discern at a distance the Angel in the path. Turn from every unlawful pursuit, and allow in yourselves no wish or inclination to do otherwise, than as God allows. At the suggestion of your own bosom; at the solicitation of your companions; yea, at the voice of an angelic being, who would intimate that you are free from the restraints of holiness, and may go contrary to the will of God, be terrified, be alarmed. Let it hurry you back to the most entire compliance with the will of the Most High. For how can he be safe, whom God no longer keeps? How can he be virtuous or happy, with whom his Father in heaven has ceased to remonstrate.

^s Hos. iv. 17.

SERMON LXVII.

—
ON THE CHARACTER OF ABSALOM.
—

2 SAMUEL, xvi. 15.

And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Athithophel with him.

THE events of scenes which are laid in the sacred and tender relations of life, are always interesting, and generally instructive. It is this, which gives the Scripture narratives their unrivalled excellence. Unfolding the fortunes and fate of a father, a son, or a brother; a ruler or subject, a neighbour or friend, they hold our attention by their applicability to our own condition. We follow the intricate, and admire the surprising events; we exult in the joyous and weep at the tragic; we gaze at the monstrous, and recoil indignant from the base, because of men like ourselves the story is related.

The history of the person, whom the text introduces to your view, is among the finest pieces of the Old Testament. It abounds with incidents, which touch the tenderest feelings of nature, and occur in the dearest relations of life; and is full of useful and impressive instructions to every serious observer. All may contemplate with improvement this inspired story of the beautiful, accomplished, and brave, yet base and unhappy Absalom.

This renowned person was the third son of David, by Maacha, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. He appears to have been remarkable for the graces and beauty of his body, as well as for his illustrious descent. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him^a."

He is first introduced to us by the sacred historian, as avenging his sister's wrongs, by the murder of his eldest brother. He was prompted to this deed by a criminality on the part of Amnon, paralleled rarely, for horrible blackness, in the whole records of vice. But for resentment even of the greatest wrongs, to trample upon the sacred commands of God, in his anger to slay a man, yea with premeditated and deceptive malice to slay a brother, discovers thus early that inconsiderate, unprincipled spirit, which strengthened with his age, and was the cause of his ruin. If, however, no other effects of this spirit were known, his youth, the precious nature of a sister's fame, a something irresistible in every bosom, would plead the extenuation of his rashness; and with blushing silence, we should drop our tears over the dismal tale.

But it is seldom that a life, which is uncontrolled by religious fear, is marked with only one criminal act. There is an infatuating power in vice. One step beyond the line of virtue renders another less difficult. There is no trusting to self-command, when the barriers of duty are down. He who is destitute of those hallowed principles, which would restrain him from the commission of every crime, has no certainty that he will refrain from the com-

^a 2 Sam. xiv. 25.

mission of any crime. Vice is rarely single in the human heart. The man, who can be hurried by anger to murder a brother, will easily be induced by ambition to dethrone a father. Amnon's blood on Absalom's robes was white in comparison with the spots which afterwards defiled them.

Having fled because of his guilt to Geshur in Syria, he abode there three years, with the royal relations of his mother. Time had now soothed the wound in David's bosom; and forgetting the dead, he longed to embrace his living, his favourite child. His servants perceiving the tender anxiety which filled his heart, contrived by an ingenious stratagem, to obtain permission to bring the beloved fugitive back to Jerusalem. And "Absalom returned to his own house^b." Awful was the sentence of the law, which, as the minister of justice and of heaven, the king was, perhaps, obliged to have executed upon the offender. It was important, too, to the virtue of his people, and to the reputation of his government, that he should not be supposed capable of conniving at crimes, even in his own offspring. Therefore, though his son was not punished according to the severity of the law, he was not permitted, for two years after his return, to behold the face of his father. This was vexatious to the pride of the young prince. Through Joab he remonstrated to the king, who then received him into his presence, and bestowed on him the kisses of affection and forgiveness.

One would suppose, that henceforth we should see nothing but filial reverence and a virtuous life, in this hitherto careless character. Surely, Absalom, it will now be thy chief concern to cheer the

^b 2 Sam. xiv. 24.

declining age of the parent, whom thou hast so sorely grieved, and to obliterate, by the regularity of thy future deportment, the remembrance of thy past misdeeds. Alas, how slender are our hopes of those, in whom the religious principle has no place! How terrible is the progress of the wicked, who have once given the reins to their will, and follow the guidance of their evil imaginations! Restored to favour, this unprincipled young man uses the riches of paternal bounty, in procuring the gratifications of vain desires, and the attendants, force, and equipage, which may add strength to his subtilty when he shall need it. The heir presumptive murdered, and his intervening brother dead, he aspires to the kingdom; and, elate with his personal charms and interest with the people, fancies he can better manage its interests, than the old king by whom it has so long been governed. With mad ambition, he resolves to depose his fond and venerable parent from the throne. With worse than mad ambition, with the vilest, blackest treachery, he plots his father's disgrace and destruction.

But how is it possible? Surely the people will cleave to the good king, to whom they owe such victories and prosperity? This vicious, inexperienced man will never be able to drive the renowned David from his throne. So it should seem to sober reflection; but experience will tell us, it is no difficult task. The breath of popular regard is varying as the wind. The multitude are ever open to complaint, and fond of change. Absalom has already some interest with the people, and with the cunning of his mind, and smoothness of his address, he may first blind, and then lead them as he pleases. Observe the artifice he used. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and

it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.—O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him^c.” And thus he “stole the hearts of the men of Israel^d.” Victims to the delusion of appearance, they became a prey to his designs, and verified what the whole history of man attests, that the smooth guise of deceit is oftener the means, by which baseness accomplishes its purposes, than the fair argument of reason, or the rough arm of violence.

When the passions are engaged in any evil pursuit, and the mind has given itself to its attainment, there is nothing at which it will stop. Truth or falsehood, affection or enmity, piety or depravity is assumed by it with equal ease. The man, who permits himself to depart from the path of rectitude, exposes himself to be hurried into every species of iniquity. Hebron was the place, where Absalom had determined to rally his forces, and assume his usurped authority. It was necessary, he should assign some reason for going there, and he scruples not to insult his God, and use piety for his plea. He entreated his father, that He might go to Hebron to offer certain vows to the Lord, which he had vowed to pay when he abode in Geshur, “if the

^c 2 Sam. xv. 2—5.

^d Ibid. ver. 6.

Lord should bring him again to Jerusalem^e." To such ignoble duplicity, to such ruinous falsehood, must the man be driven, who abandons the restraints of principle, and enlists in the prosecution of an evil work.

We may be surprised to think, that in so short a time, this daring youth should be emboldened to attempt his enterprise. But there are always weak men, to be the tools of such characters; and wicked men, to be their abettors. There accompanied him many, who, the narrative says, "went in their simplicity, and knew not any thing^f," and the subtle, famous Ahithophel came from his city to aid the unnatural conspiracy. It was this Ahithophel, who had been the confidential counsellor of David in his prosperity, and now joined himself to his foe. It was this Ahithophel, who persuaded Absalom to prostitute his dignity, his virtue, and every noble feeling, to the base accomplishment of his nefarious designs. It was he, who could advise a son to the most certain ways of harassing and destroying a father, and when he found his counsels neglected, departed to his house "and hanged himself^g." How often have such counsellors become the victims of their own plots, and been left by the awful judgment of God, to punish themselves for their own depravity!

By the aid of this evil man, new followers of Absalom were daily added, and he succeeded so far as to compel the king to flee with his adherents from Jerusalem. And here, there opens upon us one of the most affecting scenes, which imagination can picture, or conceive. A venerable monarch driven from his city, in the evening of life; a city, whose

^e 2 Sam. xv. 8.

^f Ibid. ver. 11.

^g Ibid. xvii. 23.

protector and ornament he had been ; driven from it by his son ; by the son of his fondest indulgence ; a son, whose life he had spared, when it should have been taken for justice, and who owed to him the strength and address which he turned against him. Ill-fated David ! How now returned to thy ear the Prophet's awful denunciation, "The sword shall never depart from thine house"^h!" With what bitter remorse, didst thou review the sin which brought all this evil upon thee ! But he bore his adversity like a good man. With meekness he kissed the chastising hand, and sustained all the aggravating circumstances of his calamity. "And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His habitation : but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Himⁱ." With sentiments like these, the grieved parent left the city : "and Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him^k."

With such designs, and counsellor, and leader, what might we not expect from this posture of affairs ? It is happy indeed for men, that there is a Deity, whose providence rules the events of life. By a wonderful interposition the counsel of Ahithophel, which would most probably have been successful, was rejected, and the advice of Hushai, a friend of David in disguise, was unanimously approved. This shrewd person exhorted him to assemble all his numerous adherents, and go forth with them in person to the battle^l. Addressing

^h 2 Sam. xii. 10.

^k Ibid. xvi. 15.

ⁱ Ibid. xv. 25, 26.

^l Ibid. xvii. 11.

himself to his vanity, he elated him with an anticipation of glorious achievement, and delighted the vain Absalom with the thought, that if his adversary were “ gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there ^m.”

And now the time approached, when the Most High would bring upon this wicked, rebellious son, the vengeance which his crimes deserved. The armies entered the field; and Absalom with his hosts were defeated. Terrible was the slaughter among his people. He took to flight. But as he rode in his haste through the wood, in which the battle was fought, “ his head caught hold of the thick boughs of a great oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away ⁿ.” Apprised of his situation, Joab hastened to the place, and thrust him through with darts, and the adherents of the king took down his body and cast it into an ignominious grave. Unhappy end of an unprincipled life!

You are doubtless anxious to know, how the king received the tidings of this extraordinary issue of the battle. Words cannot express his grief. His parental tenderness, the struggles of nature are so beautifully described by the sacred historian, that I must give you the scene in his own words.

“ And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman

^m 2 Sam. xvii. 13.

ⁿ Ibid. xviii. 9.

saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. And the watchman said, Methinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. And, behold, Cushie came; and Cushie said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushie, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushie answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Not the victory over his enemies, nor all the gratulations of his friends, could solace his sorrows for the melancholy fate of his rebellious child. The utmost wickedness had not exhausted his parental love. Like the Eternal Father over our fallen race, his pity yearned over

the misfortunes of his son: and the profligate youth, as is generally the case, occasioned more grief at his death, than he had done good in his life.

From this interesting story, which we have thus imperfectly contemplated, we may derive many useful reflections.

In the first place, it teaches us all, and especially the young, the solemn importance of acquiring a control over our passions and desires. These, if left to be their own directors, may make us base, will make us miserable. To what duplicity and rashness, to what barbarity and guilt, to what unhappiness and ruin, was Absalom led by his ungoverned anger and ambition! It is probable, in the first determinations of his mind, not half the wickedness, into which he should be drawn, was foreseen. A brother's blood, a parent's anguish, perfidy and parricide, are objects, methinks, at which the most monstrous nature would at first recoil. But passion is an infatuating monster. When it has bent the man to the attainment of its object; thought, mercy, duty, a parent's claims, God's positive commands, all fall before it. It makes a man in its haste, what he would shudder to be, in the most vicious moments of reflection. While we mourn its effects in the beautiful Absalom, let us learn the wisdom, let us see the necessity, of early and steadily bringing every thought of our hearts under the discipline of reason and religion.

The story further teaches parents the solemn importance of implanting and cultivating in their offspring those principles, which are the only sure preservatives from debasement and crime. Happy for David, had he been more severe with his darling son. Not that we plead the cause of justice, and chide the weakness that spared his life. For who

can wonder, that the arm was feeble which should have been lifted for the destruction of a child. But he was evidently too indulgent. It should seem impossible, that such hypocrisy, treachery, and cruelty, such a total destitution of moral feeling could exist in a bosom, which had early and properly been formed to the sensibilities of virtue, and obligations of religion. The probability is, that delighted with the graces and accomplishments of his external form, he vainly doated on his beauteous boy, and neglected to form in him the principles of truth and duty; the better beauties of a virtuous mind. Sad were the fruits of his indulgence and neglect. Let parents learn from it, as they value their peace, and their offspring's felicity, to consider good principles, and upright habits, as the best gifts they can bestow upon their children.

We may thirdly learn from this history the barbarity and odiousness of filial disobedience. Who can behold the good king, and "sweet psalmist of Israel^p," driven in old age from his house and city, and read that he "went up barefoot by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up^q," without feeling his bosom rise indignant at the monstrous son, who could thus destroy a fond father's peace! When we hear the parent unsubdued by the indignities of his child, saying to the captains of his hosts, as they went forth to the battle, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom^r:" who can help remarking the strength and disinterestedness of the affection which lives in a parent's breast; and feeling the sacredness of the duty, which we owe to our fathers and mothers? Well may filial ingratitude wear the stamp of base-

^p 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

^q Ibid. xv. 30.

^r Ibid. xviii. 5.

ness in every clime. Justly does it deserve the pointed displeasure of the common Father of men. Observe what shame and wretchedness it brought upon Absalom, and mark the source from which his punishment came. “The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Athithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom^s.”

Finally. We may learn from our subject, the folly and danger of priding ourselves in the possession of personal accomplishments, and external charms. We see in the case before us, that this may be joined with all that is odious in nature; that they may conceal a heart, and cover a disposition, which excite our abhorrence. Pride too in these exterior excellencies, in the graces of person or human accomplishments, is apt to render men negligent of more solid and useful, nobler and more permanent qualities. Had Absalom thought less of his beauty, he would have thought more of virtue. Had he trusted less to his cunning, he would have depended more upon his God. As if to punish this foolish vanity, external endowments, when unaccompanied by the excellencies of the heart and mind, are generally sources of misconduct and disappointment to their possessor, and often are the causes of disgrace. Beautiful were the locks of Absalom; with pride he polled them every year, and weighed the produce after the king's weight. But alas, vain youth! He was caught in the tree by his flowing hair, and the occasion of his pride was the instrument of his ruin. Let every one then be induced to build his complacence, only on the excellencies of an amiable heart and upright mind.

^s 2 Sam. xvii. 14.

Let us cultivate those principles and habits, which shed a genuine, permanent, and protecting lustre upon life. Let us seek the glory which cometh from God only, and array ourselves in the beauty of that wisdom, in which we may be truly lovely while we are here, and “shine as the stars for ever and ever¹,” in another and a better world.

¹ Dan. xii. 3.

SERMON LXVIII.

—
ON THE CHARACTER OF THE ETHIOPIAN
EUNUCH.
—

ACTS, viii. 39.

He went on his way rejoicing.

THAT Providence is ever busy in promoting the felicity of His creatures, is a grand and joyous truth. The contemplation of it, as it is discovered in the works of nature, pleases and consoles the mind. We behold it with wonder and instruction, in the history of elapsed time, and in the occurrences of life. The little tales which elucidate it catch the attention; and when their heroes are renowned, or their events great, they equally amuse and improve. The sacred Scriptures, all written for our benefit, abound with valuable information clothed in this kind of garb: and some of the best instructions concerning the duties, and the government of life, are to be collected from their historic records of extraordinary persons and events. One, most abounding with moral suggestions, most evincive of the Divine providence and goodness, and most meet to be remembered and improved, is that concerning the blessed mortal of whom it is said, "He went on his way rejoicing." Such an emphatic attribution of happiness to a pilgrim in this vale of misery, cannot but

excite our curiosity concerning the person of whom it is asserted. Both social and self love must feel inquisitive about the source of his superior fortune ; and no humane bosom can be uninterested in a story, whose close exhibits a fellow mortal in the tranquil fruition of rational felicity.

It will be best, in order that we may profitably peruse the sacred narrative,

To know, in the first place, the character of this favourite of Heaven :

Secondly, to examine the nature of his joy :

And thirdly, to ascertain the way in which he acquired such enviable satisfaction.

The Scriptures give us to understand that the hero of this tale was “ a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure^a.” It is most probable that this Candace was a queen of the ancient Island Meroe, appendant to the vast territory of Ethiopia, and famous, in Pliny, for female sovereigns bearing the name of the princess here mentioned. The Eunuch appears to have been high in her favour, and to have possessed her full confidence. It is probable, from the customs of the country, and from the circumstances of the story, that he was a prime officer of her kingdom. It is evident, also, that he was one of those whom the Jews denominated proselytes of justice, because they were converted from Paganism to the Jewish faith. He might have been proselyted at the period, when so many Jews were spread through this distant country from Alexandria. Be this as it may, he was evidently a believer in the Jewish religion, for he “ had come to Jerusalem for to worship.” If

^a Acts viii. 27.

greatness, therefore, can interest, or goodness affect us, the character of this Ethiopian entitles him to attention. He was a man of high station, and of extensive influence; and was returning from Jerusalem, whither he had resorted to discharge the sacred duties of devotion. We find him returning home, with a mind surcharged with newly acquired bliss; and are here led,

To examine, secondly, the nature of his joy. What has this eunuch found, since he left the place of his residence, to render his excursion the most fortunate act of his life? With all the smiling placidness of prosperity, he is on his way home rejoicing. Has he in business found a lucky hour, and, by some fortunate occurrence, obtained an affluence of wealth? By his office, and the style in which he journeyed, he needed no acquisition of property, and by the character of his joy, it was more permanent than any which riches can afford. Had he received the titles, distinctions and plaudits of honour, and was he bearing to his acquaintance the insignia of new glory? He had been among the Jews who were too selfish readily to bestow their dignities upon strangers, and was going among a people, who would view Jewish honours with derision. Had he found in this strange land a congenial soul, and was he exulting in the possession of a friend, to share with him the comforts and the cares of life? He was "sitting in his chariot"^b alone. But do we know any sources of joy, independent of all these which have been mentioned?—The Ethiopian had become a Christian. It was not the treasurer of Candace; it was not the proselyte of Judaism, but it was the disciple of Jesus, "who went

^b Acts viii. 28.

on his way rejoicing." This was the only change which had been wrought in his circumstances, since he came from home. It was this, which was sufficient to give him a felicity, of which he did not know himself susceptible, and to dispel darkness and disquiet from his mind. He had, indeed, found a rich treasure. He had received an high honour. He had met with an invaluable friend. But they were not such as the world denote by those names. The treasure was the tidings of the Messiah. The honour was the initiation by baptism into the family of Christ. The friend was the Redeemer of man. It was the acquisition of these boons, which gave such pleasure and satisfaction to the eunuch's mind, as his station and endowments had never yet afforded. As a man, he felt the necessity of a Saviour, and was led, by the character of the Most High, and the predictions of Prophets, to hope for a Deliverer. But hitherto he was ignorant of the counsels of heaven, and perplexed by the "shadow of things to come^c." Now he had found in Jesus, "Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets, did write^d;" a Saviour of sinners; the Redeemer of the world. As a free agent, he had some perception of the excellence of virtue, and some sense of moral obligation. But hitherto his knowledge of duty was very imperfect, and the unconquerable strength of vice, rendered him the sport of delusion, or the victim of despair. Now his duty was made fully evident; he saw the dominion of sin broken; feeble virtue was encouraged by promises of Divine assistance: and he received assurance that if he did all he could, he should find acceptance and reward. As an inhabitant of earth, he knew the

^c Col. ii. 17.

^d John i. 45.

need of some sovereign balm to heal the wounds, which he could not but receive in a world, where evils lay ambushed at every step, and every rose which delighted was surrounded with thorns. But hitherto no kind remedy had been presented, which would in all cases ease, much less effectually heal. Now he had found a physician, who could bind up the wounded heart; cause the bones which were broken, again to rejoice; assuage the anguish of bereaved affection; and bid pale woe-worn sorrow look up and smile. As a creature, he had seen and felt that he must die; and his mind had felt anxious to penetrate the gloom, which, since the first human exit, had enveloped death. But hitherto a few faint glimmerings only had quivered through the gloom; as undefined, illusory, and transient, as the gleamings of lightning through thick dark clouds. Now the dismal mystery is solved: where he feared dissolution, he finds immortality; the darkness which surrounds the tomb appears as harmless and evanescent as the western clouds, which conceal the reflex glory of the sun, which at its appointed time has set to rise with renewed lustre. These are the effects of Christianity; effects essential to human tranquillity; effects which nothing but Christianity can produce. When the illustrious Ethiopian became a Christian, he viewed life in a new light. His most anxious hopes were confirmed. His most awful fears were quieted. All the enigmas of his being were solved. He found an antidote to every bane of felicity. "He went on his way rejoicing." Surely such a fortunate change in his situation was extraordinary; and we will hasten,

In the third place, to ascertain the means which led to the acquisition of such enviable satisfaction. In this season of the year was one of the great holy

feasts, which the Almighty had commanded the Jews to consecrate. As the Ethiopian was a proselyte of the covenant, he felt it his duty to obey the commands of the Most High, and for no other purpose than to observe the hallowed time, he had come to Jerusalem. What a lesson; what a reproof for Christians! Though not obliged to make tedious pilgrimages; though each one's Zion is within is town, how trivial circumstances will deter them from religious duties! How lightly do they regard the Sabbath and other ordinances of the Most High! Yet this Ethiopian relinquishes the weighty business of office; leaves the court of his queen and the company of his friends: and from Ethiopia, far distant, encountering the most intense rays of the sun, and without prospect of any other reward than the consciousness of having done his duty, travels "to Jerusalem for to worship^e." Blush, Christian, blush; who, with all thy advantages, neglectest the institutes of thy religion; or at best consecratest but the one half of thy Lord's day! Having finished his duty to his Maker, the eunuch returns to discharge his obligations to his fellows. But he has not forgotten the impressions which he received in the sanctuary. His religion was not merely a formal ceremony, a senseless habit. Behold, as he returns from Jerusalem, he is "sitting in his chariot and reading Esaias the prophet^f." Ye, whom fortune has placed in the elevated stations of life; ye, who have with the Prophets their interpretation in the Gospel of Christ, look at this Ethiopian; and, regardless of his complexion, venerate his worth. He seriously investigates the volume of truth. As he journeys, he carries his Bible. Though in a Chariot, he is

^e Acts viii. 27.

^f Ibid. ver. 28.

perusing the Scriptures. An example, which affectingly satirizes many of the professed disciples of Christ. The Divine Being, ever ready to aid the endeavours of the humble and sincere, beheld and applauded the eunuch. By special revelation He commanded Philip to go towards the country, through which the Ethiopian would pass. His attention, directed probably by the account he had had of the recent crucifixion of Jesus, was fixed upon the prophetic description of the sufferings of the Messiah. While he laboured to understand, the Spirit bade Philip “to join himself to his chariot^g :” and he proved to the eunuch from the passage he was reading, and the other evidences of Christianity, that Jesus, was the Christ. The eunuch was convinced and baptized; and the Deity vouchsafed a confirmation to his faith, by taking Philip from him in a supernatural manner. Thus by being in the practice of virtue; by studying the Scriptures, and by possessing a docile mind, was this worthy man led to see and embrace the truth: and filled with the satisfaction which Christianity gives to the mind, “he went on his way rejoicing.” His happiness was not confined to himself. Through him, his country was blessed. By his means, probably, the ancient prediction was accomplished, that Ethiopia should early “stretch out her hands unto God^h.” The Abyssinians, say travellers and geographers, to this day, venerate his memory; and at every ministration of baptism relate, with pious gratitude, the conversion of the Eunuch.

Thus we have attended to all the circumstances of this interesting narrative. We learn from the story the blessedness of observing the ordinances,

^g Acts viii. 29.

^h Ps. lxxviii. 31.

which religion has hallowed ; the usefulness of reading, studying, and investigating without discouragement, the word of truth ; the readiness of Divine providence to aid with His Spirit and blessing, the humble and sincere inquirer, who uses the means which He has appointed ; the peace and joy which they have in believing, who have embraced the Messiah ; and the happiness of the country whose nobles and officers are taught of God. Let us then be instructed by the treasurer of Candace, amidst the honours, the pleasures, and the avocations of life, to be mindful of religion. Let not our goodness be confined to the temple, but when we have finished our devotions, let us study the Scriptures. While we ponder their sacred pages, let our hearts be humble, and our minds docile, if haply the Spirit which blessed the Eunuch, may open our eyes, and fill us with His peace. “ Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment ; and such as are gentle, them shall he learn His wayⁱ.”

Christian ! Hast thou too found in Jesus of Nazareth “ Him of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets, did write^k ; one, “ who hath borne thy griefs, and carried thy sorrows ;—and with whose stripes thou art healed^l ?” Hast thou hastened in baptism to join thyself to Him, and by this rite, which He ordained, are thy sins washed away ; and thy interest in the privileges and hopes of His family assured unto thee ? Go on thy “ way rejoicing.” There may be yet before thee a long journey. It may be, thou shalt meet with some trials by the way. But faithful and mighty is He who hath promised, and is able to perform it. Let thy

ⁱ Ps. xxv. 8.

^k John i. 45.

^l Is. liii. 4, 5.

hope then be strong; thy faith stedfast; thy life pious and obedient to God, fulfilling all His ordinances with a willing mind: and thou shalt descend into "the valley of the shadow of death"^m, "rejoicing with joy unspeakable"ⁿ in God thy Redeemer.

^m Ps. xxiii. 4.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 8.

S E R M O N L X I X .

ON THE CHARACTER OF CORNELIUS.

ACTS, x. 31.

Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

To know and survey the characters of men who have stood foremost in events which concerned the whole human race, is gratifying and instructive. The mind feels a satisfaction in thinking, this was the leader of the great occurrence; in him first opened the interesting scene; and if he were renowned for good qualities, we look to learn, as well as to admire. If these be the sentiments of my hearers, they will at once feel interested in the character introduced in the text. What event more greatly important, than the breaking down of the partition, which separated one people to the service and communications of the Most High? what occurrence more interesting, especially to us who were not of God's people, than the admission of the heathen to share with the Jew the richest revelation from the eternal mind? It was Cornelius who received the earnest of this great gift. First Gentile proselyte to the Gospel, our Abraham in respect to his call, he stands conspicuous, and claims our

notice. His character, as given in the chapter from which the text is taken, the blessing he received, and the instructions arising from the subject, invite your attention, as calculated to unfold the essential nature of religion, with some truths of special practical importance.

To keep the conquered Jews in orderly subjection, there were bands of soldiers stationed in different parts of Palestine under the Roman control. As captain of one of these bands, gathered in Italy, and eminent in profane history, Cornelius dwelt at Cæsarea, about seventy miles from Jerusalem. It appears, that though an heathen, he had from his intercourse with the Jews, or in some other way, become a worshipper of the Supreme Invisible Jehovah, without subjecting himself to their rites, or feeling bound by their laws. The sacred record styles him "a devout man^a;" an expression significant in the Scriptures of one who acknowledges the only true God, in distinction from polytheists and idolaters, and generally applied to those, who, as adorers of the same Lord, without being admitted to circumcision and its consequent privileges, are elsewhere styled 'proselytes of the gate.' Convinced of the existence of one only Almighty Being, he felt holy obligations, and cherished the principles, which flow from the relation of that Being to man and the universe.

There are many men (alas! they form too large a part of our race) who, though they believe in no other God than the Lord, yet forget Him; refuse His laws; feel not restrained by His government nor presence, and neglect those services which, if He exist and they are intelligent, are their most solemn duty. Such was not Cornelius. He feared the God, whom he acknowledged with all his house.

^a Acts. x. 2.

His belief in the Supreme Being was not a mere abstract notion floating in his head. It entered his heart, and planted there a reverence for the Divine character, holy emotions, an ever-living desire to please Him. His religion was not confined to his own breast. His family were kept in habits of devotion, piety, and virtue. They were made acquainted with their Maker; they were assembled at the altar, when he sacrificed; they were taught the rules which he obeyed. Receiving religion as a celestial guest, he introduced her into the family with which Providence had blest him, and made her a constant resident therein. He “feared God with all his house^b.”

Various are the forms in which religion was clothed before the promulgation of the Gospel. Strange and incongruous have her appearances sometimes been among Christians. In one, she has been seen a cold, retiring spectre, placing her merit in her misery. In another, a frantic, superstitious being, displaying her divinity in immolating human victims, or counting beads. Here she has seemed a stupid, senseless form, prostrate to a stock or stone. There a fantastic, airy enthusiast, consecrating whims, or living on reveries. In some a profusion of sympathies and generous deeds has been exhibited as her form, while it has been unanimated by one pious principle, or one spark of holiness: in others a piety, hallowing hours, observing seasons, and making many prayers, without a smile of mercy for the penitent offender, or a tear of compassion for the poor and the wretched. Strange incongruities! Perversions of religion’s name to cover constitutional frailties, habits of ignorance, errors of education, selfishness, and pride. Religion, as she descends undisguised from above, is of plain,

^b Acts x. 2.

cheerful, and lovely; yet holy, firm, and dignified appearance. Would you see the outlines of her character, the prominent features of her native excellence? They claim your admiration in Cornelius. He “gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway:” that is, it was his delight and labour to relieve the wants of the needy, to sweeten the portion of the miserable, to diffuse happiness among his fellow men: and in public and private offices of worship to God, he was regular and frequent. Real benevolence, and sincere devotion ever go hand in hand. When each grows out of the other, and both proceed from a regard to the Divine will, they form the sum and substance of religion. A man may “bestow all his goods to feed the poor^c,” he may mark each minute of the day with some act of liberality; and yet, if he be destitute of affection and piety towards his Maker, he wants that principle, which gives benevolence its worth; his will be a hollow virtue, “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal^d.” On the other hand, though a man rigidly observe all holy times, though he talk much of God, and do no act unsanctified with a prayer:—if he be destitute of regard for the happiness of his race; if he “shut up his bowels of compassion^e,” if the wishes and exertions of mercy and kindness have no cultivation in his bosom: his worship is an imperfect service, unsatisfactory to the God of love. Benevolence and devotion, charity and piety, united as they eminently were in Cornelius, discover the man who rightly feareth God; and form the properly religious character.

In scenes of temptation, on lofty sites, or where we look for vice, virtue has a more glorious, because a more extraordinary appearance. The star which

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

^d Ibid. ver. 1.

^e 1 John iii. 17.

breaks through the misty atmosphere, when all its fellows have withdrawn their light, discovers more strikingly the gloominess of the scene, but is itself marked for its superiority. A good character in a corrupt circle attracts the admiration of a melancholy attention. The piety and virtue of Cornelius are the more pleasing, because of his station and office. A soldier, born to the ambition and pride of a Roman; high in power above his fellows; surrounded by the allurements of the wealthy Cæsarea, amidst a people strange, conquered, and resentful, he yet is humble, devout, and charitable. How many would have excused their piety on account of their office! how many, their charity, because the objects of it were hateful Jews! But moved by none of these things, and correcting that vanity, which assumes true goodness exclusive to its own class, or thinks there are stations in which piety and benevolence never exist, we find “Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway^f.” Such a character can never fail of love and respect. We are not surprised to hear his domestics giving to the Apostle the unflattering, cordial testimony to his worth; that he was “just,” and “of good report among all the nation of the Jews^g :” so exemplarily religious in himself and his family, in a station so unaccommodated to virtue, we should naturally expect he would be an object of the special favour of the Being, who views His creatures with one common eye, and promises to honour them who honour Him^h.

If we proceed to the blessing Cornelius received, we shall find it was conspicuously the case. The

^f Acts x. 1, 2.

^g Ibid. ver. 22.

^h 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Divine Being created man for felicity. By his fall he made himself obnoxious to instant destruction. Christ intervened and he lived. Early He began in the hearts of some the great and benevolent work of building up our ruined nature, into a pristine resemblance to the Divine likeness. To effect this restoration in the soul of every man, was His mighty purpose: and, "in every nation, he that feared God, and worked righteousness," did it by His unknown Spirit, and was through Him "accepted" with the Fatherⁱ. In Cornelius we discover extraordinary attainments. Benevolence and piety, the sum of the Saviour's practice and preaching, were large and thriving in his bosom. They grew under the industrious use of the means he had in his power, and the riches of the Divine Spirit rewarding his endeavours. He needed but to know Christ to believe in Him, as the Author of all the progress he had made in goodness, and of all the hopes he could indulge. He wanted but this belief, to be the Christian in name and deed.

To those, in whom Christ has by His Spirit dwelt their invisible friend, He will, if He have been welcomed, in some way and time be visibly manifested. The Gospel had been preached throughout Judea. As was predicted, the Messiah had "come unto His own, and His own received Him not^k." It was however, though preached first to them, a revelation for the whole human race. Now it was to be promulgated to the Gentiles. They were to be admitted to a full and equal fruition with the Jews, of the communications from the Eternal: and Cornelius was destined to be the first, who should realize this great behest.

Accordingly at a time when, with holy exercises,

ⁱ Acts x. 35.

^k John i. 11.

he had disciplined his mind, and in humble prayer sought the Divine blessing, he was instructed by an angel, sent to him from heaven with the joyful assurance in my text, to send for St. Peter, the great Apostle of the Jews, and learn of him the will of the Most High. He “was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision¹.” St. Peter in the mean time had the scruples of the Jew removed, and his heart prepared to comply with the Centurion’s request, by an extraordinary revelation, that in the Gospel overtures all nations under heaven were included, and that he should henceforth call no man common nor unclean^m. The messengers arrived; the Apostle went with them, and was welcomed by the Centurion and his friends. The foundation of the Apostle’s work was already laid, in the Centurion’s strong belief and reverence for God; and his humble, anxious desire to learn how he might be saved. St. Peter therefore opened to him the character of Jesus Christ. He dwelt upon the miracles He had wrought in evidence of His authority. He related and explained His crucifixion. He declared and attested himself the mighty resurrection. He preached the consequent consolatory doctrines of immortality, and future glory. And he lastly led his hearers to the revered Prophets; showed that they all pointed to Christ; that in Him all their wonderful predictions were singularly verified, and that they united their testimony with his own, that “through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sinsⁿ.” Standing in the presence of God, and listening to the ministry of His word, with meekness and fear, the mind of Cornelius was filled with that wisdom which is from above, and he embraced with full satisfaction, the “truth as it is in Jesus^o.” The

¹ Acts xxvi. 19.

ⁿ Ibid. x. 43.

^m Ibid. x. 28.

^o Eph. iv. 21.

Holy Spirit confirmed their faith, and ratified this adoption of the Gentiles. The Centurion and his family were, by baptism, incorporated into the Church, and made heirs of all the hopes and promises of the blessed Gospel.

Would we estimate the honour of this acquisition? Consider him and his family, as selected by the Eternal, to be the first fruits to Him of the Gentile world. What, though St. Peter was called to account for his neglect of Levitical rules! Cornelius was a seal of his ministry, more valuable than fame or ease: and to the Centurion how ample the blessing, that he should be the first heathen object of Gospel favour. Would we estimate the worth of the acquisition? Behold him but imperfectly acquainted with his God. Conscious of his sinfulness, he fasted. Dissatisfied with the sacrifices of the Jews, and their legal purgation; considering man as an enigma, and perplexed by those doubts in which, to the best of heathens the human destination was involved; he felt that something was yet wanting to his happiness. He prayed; and God vouchsafed to send His minister, to declare to him the glad tidings of salvation, through the blood of the cross. He believed and was happy.

We here see the reward from Him “which seeth in secret^p,” upon the prayer and the alms of faith and love. Doubtless the devotion of the Centurion sought not observation. His deeds of benevolence were often done silently and tenderly, uncovetous of fame. They all however rose as an offering to Heaven, and, received by the Angel, were presented to the Almighty with the prayers of the saints. They fitted him for the blessing which they brought down upon him; a blessing, whose value we have already

^p Matt. vi. 4.

observed. For every Christian uniting benevolence and devotion in his character, and wearing them humbly through life, an equal reward is prepared. If it come not immediately, it is nevertheless sure. Not a sincere petition is offered to Heaven unheard; not an act, not an intention of charity is unnoticed by Him, who enters the conduct of His creatures in His book. If they return not with a blessing, they remain with a double blessing in reserve. They found a treasure for us in the land, where we are destined to dwell. It shall give us happiness in the moment of death, that, hidden with Christ, we have this treasure there. Many, I am sure, are hearing me, who scarcely tell themselves the alms they do; many who always seek in intercourse with the Most High, to honour and serve Him. Perhaps to some of them, their deeds of faith and charity have not returned yet with the expected blessing. They shall find them after many days. Look at the Centurion, and be assured that ye shall be recompensed. The Angel of the Scriptures says to you, with as much certainty as to Cornelius, “Thy prayers” are heard, “and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God⁹.”

Again. From what has been said, we may remark the excellence of family religion, and how surely it obtains the smiles of Heaven. In the family where the Deity is revered, religion admitted in every scene, and virtue welcomed as the worthiest attendant; the natural fruits are order, peace, and love. He who, like Cornelius in his domestic circle, cherishes each sacred precept; raises each member to a knowledge and delight in the Invisible Protector; teaches the younger their duty, and walks with the elder in the paths of wisdom; lays a sure foundation

⁹ Acts x. 4.

for felicity. Whatever be the external condition of the family, in which the principles of religion, the graces of benevolence and piety are felt and cherished; whether the winds of adversity howl around their dwelling, or the sunbeams of prosperity shine constantly upon it; there is within an household Deity, who preserves order, and speaks peace. But if it were not the natural tendency of domestic religion to produce domestic regularity and joy, it brings upon the family in which it is eminent, the kindest regards of the Most High. What obtained for Abraham those glorious privileges, that were at once his honour and his interest? "I know him," says the Almighty, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord^r." What was the prominent excellence in Cornelius? He "feared God with all his house^s." He from whom is "every good gift and every perfect gift^t," seems to observe with special pleasure the exertions of heads of families, to render their posterity humble and benevolent, moral and devout. And yet I am preaching an old fashioned truth. But let me ask, is not the neglect of these things inconsistent in Americans? To what have they traced the worth of their Hero and friend, when they could behold him no more? To his habits of virtue; to his regard for sacred things; to his domestic devotions; to his fearing God. Surely then I touch no insensible string, when I urge the importance of educating each generation as it rises, and guiding all who are under our management, in the principles and habits of benevolence and devotion. Let philosophy argue, and licentiousness scoff, as they will. He will not fail of respectability, usefulness, and satisfaction, who "feareth God with all

^r Gen. xviii. 19.^s Aets x. 2.^t James i. 17.

his house :” and such a family is fitly compared with Sion, because “ there the Lord promised His blessing ^u.”

And, finally, we shall infer from what has been said, the wisdom of using all the ordinary and appointed means of improving our nature, and becoming “ wise unto salvation ^x.” How many men are there, who are ready to say, If the Deity has promulged a Gospel for my benefit, why does he not bring me to believe it? How many, who doubt not the truth of Christianity, neglect its sacraments, saying to themselves, Can the sprinkling with water, or the eating of bread be essential to my salvation? Had Cornelius reasoned thus, he might have come short of his blessing. An angel appeared to him, and directed him to send for Simon to Joppa^y. Persons of the above character would in this case have reasoned, Cannot the Angel tell me, without further trouble, what I ought to do? Need I, when he can visit me, send forty miles for a fellow mortal to instruct me? Surely, the Apostle is not greater than the Angel. It is an unnecessary requisition.—But our Saviour had hallowed a ministry in His Church. The Most High, without necessity, suspends not His established rules. It is the duty of men to observe His appointment. Cornelius, with infinite benefit, disdained not to obey the Divine mandate: and permit his example and blessedness, to act as an inducement to every one to reverence each office, each ordinance, and every institution which our Lord has appointed, as the proper means of improving our virtues, and obtaining the blessed hope of everlasting life.

^u Ps. cxxxiii. 4.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^y Acts x. 5.

SERMON LXX.



DELIVERED AT THE CONSECRATION OF
TRINITY CHURCH, COLUMBIA.



1 KINGS, viii. 66.

On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

THESE words conclude the account of one of the sublimest, and most interesting occurrences, recorded in the sacred volume. A magnificent temple had been built to Jehovah. There were assembled to its dedication, “the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel^a.” An innumerable company of Priests and Levites; “a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt^b.” While the preparations were making, “King Solomon was there, with all the congregation of Israel, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude^c.” When the ark of the Covenant of the Lord had been brought in unto his place, and the house was passing into the possession of Almighty God, to whom it was built, the king, upon his knees,

^a 1 Kings viii. 1.

^b Ibid. ver. 65.

^c Ibid. ver. 5.

offering a prayer of dedication, scarcely inferior to the temple in its sublimity; nor to the ark, before which it was offered in its holiness. It has been read to you, in one of the Lessons appointed for this occasion. And who that heard it, believes not that the Spirit which filled the House, filled also the heart of him who devoted it to the Most High. To the consecration of this temple, succeeded several days of festive pleasure, and social joy. And “on the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David His servant, and for Israel His people.”

We may see here in this temple, a type of every Christian Church; and in David, a type of Jesus our Lord; and in Israel, a type of the people of the Redeemer. The blessings which the congregation bestowed on the king, by whom the temple had been built, teach us the obligations which any people are under to those who accomplish the erection for them of places of public worship. And the emotions of the hearts of all Israel on this occasion, describes the delight which is this day felt by many of my hearers; and which should always be felt, when a temple is built and consecrated for the worship of God.

But why should the erection of Churches, and consecration of them to the service of the Most High, be an occasion of such extraordinary joyfulness and gladness of heart? This is the subject of our discourse. And we shall find sufficient reasons for joy and gladness on such occasions, if we consider them with respect to Almighty God, to whom the buildings are devoted; to the country in which they are reared; or to the people, who shall enjoy the blessings and benefits which may be found in them; and they are erected to secure.

In the first place, with respect to God. When

Churches are erected for His worship, it is a joyful thing that He, in whose glory every intelligent being should feel interested, is becomingly honoured. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things^d.” Nevertheless, He is pleased to consider Himself honoured by the devotions of His creatures; and those devotions are, to themselves and the world, a proper memorial of His excellence, and declaration of His praise.

Man’s dispositions towards his Maker, to be expressed in a manner correspondent to his nature, must be expressed by sensible acts. No acts of his, in his social character, are more significant of reverence, homage, and adoration to the Almighty, than the devotion to Him of places of worship, great and magnificent, according to the means with which He hath blessed them. Without His temple, God is forgotten. The appropriation of part of their wealth by men, to build Him an house for His service, speaks a reverent remembrance of His name, and a laudable desire to “make His praise glorious^e.”

How suitable a homage to the Deity this is, may appear from the care of mankind, in every country, and in every age, to honour their gods with places for their names, and memorials of their supposed presence and greatness. Where among the heathens is the god, who had not his image, his altar, or his temple? It was a grief to David, that while he himself, “dwelt in an house of cedar, the ark of God dwelt within curtains^f.” Before any command required it, nature taught men to consecrate places

^d Acts xvii. 24, 25.

^e Ps. lxvi. 2.

^f 2 Sam. vii. 2.

to the worship of the Most High. Noah, when he went out of the ark, “ builded an altar^g.” Wherever the Patriarchs in their journeyings pitched their tents, they erected places for Divine worship. And Moses, before the Ark was made, and the residence for it, “ according to the pattern shewed to him in the mount^h,” pitched a tabernacle without the camp, in honour of Jehovah, to which every one that sought the Lord was to go.

How acceptable this homage is to God, we may learn from His own lips and conduct. Even on the purpose of David to build Him a temple, He bestowed His approbation. “ Whereas,” said the High and Mighty One, who inhabiteth eternity, “ whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heartⁱ.” Moses He instructed how to make the tabernacle. He blessed and rewarded Solomon, when the temple he had builded was finished. In the houses of His worship, He condescended to “ place His name^k.” When the tabernacle and temple were devoted to Him, He filled them with His presence in His glorious cloud; and in his fixed and terrible glory, vouchsafed to dwell there upon the mercy-seat.

Surely, every new instance of such acceptable, and expressive homage to their Creator and Redeemer, must be gratifying to His intelligent offspring. Were a statue and monument erected to the honour of the father who begat and sustained you, of the sovereign of your country, or of the friend who had blessed you with his counsel and his love; would you not behold it with delight, and speak of it with joy? How much rather, when there is raised on earth, a temple to the glory and service of your Father in heaven, the Sovereign of the universe, the best

^g Gen. viii. 20.

^h 1 Kings viii. 18.

ⁱ Heb. viii. 5.

^k Deut. xiv. 25.

Benefactor, and most affectionate Friend! The world presents much to dishonour and pain Him. It is a relief; it is a felicity to know that, amidst the confusions, follies, and pollutions of the earth:—while man is destroying man, and war's ruthless hand is desolating the fabrics of art, and in the whirl of outrage and vice, God is forgotten:—Piety, holiest and happiest inhabitant of the earth, is in some places employed in raising mansions for the celebration of God's glory, and the abode of the ark of the Covenant of peace. Turn, oh! turn Thy face, Holy and Almighty Being, from the temples of idolatry, and abodes of pollution which are on our globe! Turn, oh! turn Thy face from the atheism, the ingratitude, and strifes of men, and condescend to behold the buildings which Thy children do humbly rear, that in them, they may worship Thee and learn to "love one another¹."

But we are to consider places of worship with respect to the country in which they are erected: and, in this view, the erection of them is a cause for joy and gladness of heart. He who loves his country, would have it adorned with what is beautiful in art, and excellent in character. It is the happiest application of art, to furnish fit temples for the worship of the Almighty. Such temples beautify the regions in which they stand. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel^m!" Pleasant are they to the eye, "as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath plantedⁿ." Who indeed would have his posterity search in vain among the buildings of their ancestors, for houses in which religion was honoured, and her peaceful influences enjoyed? Who, if the traveller shall one day come to survey

¹ John xv. 12.^m Numb. xxiv. 5.ⁿ Ibid. ver. 6.

the ruins in his country, which calamity or time may produce, would not have his attention arrested by vestiges of temples, which should show that the inhabitants loved what was great and public, and worshipped God ?

Especially, if it be further considered, that the appearance of such edifices indicates civilization, and suggests many pleasing associations, and agreeable hopes. They are monuments in a country, that piety is or has been revered there. They tell us, that the people have the means of Christian improvement, and the transporting prospects which Christianity opens. Hence the satisfaction with which the stranger speaks of them, and the elevated emotions with which we behold them. The eye wearied with contemplating the habitations and desolations, which remind us only of earth and misery, rests relieved and brightening with joy upon the fane, which intimates that there is piety on the earth ; and on the spire which points to heaven. Naked is that country, destitute of the best monuments of wisdom and improvement, in which Churches, of suitable magnificence, do not abound.

In this view of the subject, joy in the erection of them may well spring from the hope, that they may bring blessings upon the land, in which they are consecrated and endowed. “ For thy temple’s sake at Jerusalem^o,” was a plea of great avail with the Most High. Upon Zion, the hill where His temple stood, God “ promised His blessing^p.” When the Jews sent an embassy to Jesus Christ, in behalf of the afflicted Centurion, this was their commendation of him : “ he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue^q.” From the anxiety of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh,

^o Ps. lxxviii. 29.

^p Ibid. cxxxiii. 4.

^q Luke vii. 5.

to build an altar on this side Jordan, and the remonstrances then used with them by the other tribes, it would appear that in those days, the country was considered unhallowed and unprotected, in which no temple or holy place was found. In every place, where the memorial of His Name should be recorded, the Almighty promised to meet His people with His blessing. "Go up to the mountain," said He, in the time when no temple was found in His land, "go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified. Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore, the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands^r:" intimating, that a cause of public calamities was the neglect to provide places for public worship in the land; and that the erection, and right use of them were means of obtaining Divine favour. This important, though unheeded truth is consonant with the dictates of reason. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain^s." But how shall He be expected to keep that city, in which He hath no dwelling place? On what ground shall the people look for His presence and blessing, who refuse to provide for Him a house, that He may "place His name there^t?" Dost thou love thy country? Rejoice in the erection of every

^r Hag. i. 8—11.

^s Ps. cxxvii. 2.

^t Deut. xiv. 23.

new Church in her land. When the destroying Angel shall pass over her, these buildings may be pleasant to the eyes of God, and there may arise from them the prayers and praises, which may avert His wrath, and obtain for her forgiveness and favour.

But we approach here the third view we are to take of new Churches : namely, with respect to the people, who shall enjoy in them the blessings and benefits which they are erected to secure. And here, what a crowd of thoughts rush upon the mind. Who can estimate the pleasures and advantages of access to the house of God ? Who can sum up the blessings and benefits of the sanctuary ?

It is in the house of God, that the pleasures of social worship are most highly and extensively enjoyed. And if there be any thing which will give holiness and elevation to human desires ; any thing which will soften the asperities of social intercourse, and improve the manners and character of men : it is to meet together at stated times, in the house of their common Parent, to recognize their relations to Him and each other, and to seek the influence of His instructions and grace, for the attainment together of eternal life.

It is in the house of God, that communion with the Father of our spirits is most purely and intimately enjoyed. He is with us in our closets. He is every where present. But in His temple He delights to dwell. It is here He is present in an especial manner ; probably, with the retinue of His Angels, as the decorations of His ancient tabernacle and temple intimated, and as the declarations of His word, and the opinions of the primitive Church warrant us to suppose : and retired from the noise and infatuations of the world, the devout soul, under the influence of the holiness of the place, becomes

more still, more sensible of His presence, and draws nearer to her God. If but “two or three be gathered together in His name, He is there in the midst of them ^u.”

It is in the house of God, that the word of His truth will be most surely preached, and most attentively heard:—that word, which He sent the Son of His bosom to proclaim to a ruined world:—that word, which is glad tidings of great joy to all people; and “deliverance to the captives,” and recovery of “sight to the blind:”—that word, which “sets at liberty them that were bruised^x:”—that word, which causes “the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing^y:”—that word, which is our comfort in trouble, which is as a “lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path^z,” which bringeth salvation, and showeth us heaven. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace^a.” If it were only to be entertained by them, with disquisitions upon the most important topics, it were no little gratification. But this is a small part of their business. It is their office, to bring you to an acquaintance with God, and with His will concerning you, as He hath revealed it in His word. It is their office, to raise before you the cross, and show you “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world^b,” expiring upon it; and to take of its blood, and sprinkle it upon all your garments, that when the destroying angel shall execute the vengeance of the Almighty upon a guilty world, it may be to you the token for preservation. It is their office, to go before you into the tomb, with the

^u Matt. xviii. 20.

^x Luke iv. 18.

^y Is. xxxv. 6.

^z Ps. cxix. 105.

^a Is. lii. 7.

^b John i: 29.

bright torch which revelation furnishes, to disperse the blackness of darkness which hangs over its entrance; to show you “the place where Jesus lay^c” to wipe the tears which are falling upon the mouldering relics; and, when the blood is curdling at the heart amidst the horrors of the scene, to restore to it its equal, peaceful flow, with the transporting assurance, that this awful dominion with its awful king shall be one day destroyed for ever. It is their office, to show you hell and all its terrors, and teach you to escape; to show you heaven and all its joys, and entreat you to enter. These are subjects, which the ministers of the word have in charge in the sanctuary. Where there are churches, it is reasonable to expect this ministry will be enjoyed. Who can estimate its fruits? How many “broken hearts may be bound up^d,” how many “mourners comforted^e,” how many sinners may be turned “from the error of their ways^f, to the wisdom of the just^g,” how many immortal beings snatched from perdition to the enjoyment of eternal life and bliss in heaven?

In the house of God, moreover, are found His holy sacraments. By the temple are placed the waters of Baptism, and in it the Supper of peace. To the Font men come, and are washed from sin and uncleanness; to the altar they go, and feast upon the memorials of redemption, the tokens of forgiveness and immortality. Look at the laver of regeneration; you may see in it the “beauty which is given” to sinners “for ashes.” Behold the flagons of the sacred table. They contain “the oil of joy for mourning.” In the righteousness of the Re-

^c Matt. xxviii. 6.

^d Is. lxi. 1.

^e Job xxix. 25.

^f James v. 20.

^g Luke i. 17.

deemer, which these sacraments hold forth, is found “the garments of praise,” which our compassionate Father hath provided “for the spirit of heaviness^b.”

These are the blessings which the people enjoy, who have access to the temples of God. Contrast their happiness with the condition of the people, who have no place of public worship. For them no sanctuary is near, to which they may betake themselves from their sorrows, their fears, and their spiritual enemies, to the more especial protection of Almighty God. From them there rises no sacrifice of social prayer and praise, the sweetest human offering, to their common Parent in heaven. They are not cleansed with the washing of water and the word. They never do that, which He who died for them, hath commanded to be done “in remembrance of Himⁱ.” Perhaps, the sound of his name reaches not their ears; the peaceful influences of His word and Spirit are unknown to their hearts. They live without the pleasant feasts of the Church. Even ‘Sunday shines no Sabbath day to them.’ You may find them on the bed of sickness, without hope; and without God, on the confines of eternity. Awful state of existence! Deplorable condition of intelligent and moral, dying and accountable beings! “O how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of Hosts! Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be alway praising thee. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness. For one day in Thy courts is better than a thousand^k.”

Ponder, then, in the city in which a new Church is built, the pleasures and benefits, the peace and

^b Is. lxi. 3.

ⁱ Luke xxii. 19.

^k Ps. lxxxiv. l. 4. 11. 10.

joy in this life, and the salvation in the life to come, to which they, who shall worship in it, may attain: and, as it was in Samaria, at the first preaching of the Gospel, there will be “great joy in that city¹.”

These sentiments, my brethren, are in harmony with the feelings of many of you. You have looked forward to this day, with anticipations of new and lively pleasure; and a more joyful event has not, perhaps, occurred in the years of your life, than the consecration of your Church, which, for yourselves and your posterity, you have built unto the name of the Lord your God. We participate in your felicity. It is with great satisfaction we behold your Church, decent, and convenient, and bearing the name of the Blessed Trinity, in whom is worshipped the One Only Living and True God. Blessing, and praise are due, in no small degree, to the individuals, through whose exertions and perseverance the building of this temple has been so happily accomplished. “Remember them, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out their good deeds that they have done for the house of their God, and for the offices thereof^m!”

The congregation who will assemble in this place to worship, have our cordial congratulations on the accomplishment of their wishes. You have now a Church, in which, we trust, ‘God’s true and lively word will be set forth, and His sacraments rightly and duly administered.’ How much is opened to you in this prospect! “Alien from the commonwealth of Israelⁿ,” stranger to the covenant of promise, here you may come and hear of God and Christ, and receive the seals of “an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in

¹ Acts viii. 8.

^m Neh. xiii. 14.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 12.

Jesus^o." Awakened sinner, whose bosom heaves with sorrow, and whose eye is consumed with fear, hither you may come, and learn of pardon, grace, and salvation; and hear from your Redeemer, when you have cast yourself at His feet, "Thy sins are forgiven—go in peace^p." Pious mother, here you may find a place "where you may lay your young, even the altar of the Lord of Hosts, your King and your God^q:" and He will cover them there with His wing, as His own children by adoption, that the destruction which cometh upon the ungodly, touch them not. Youthful Christian, who desirest to be recognized by thy heavenly Father, and pantest to enter upon the Christian career, here, in Confirmation, thou mayest ratify and confirm thy baptismal vows, and receive His grace and heavenly benediction; the assurance of his favour and goodness towards thee. Faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus, who desirest a nearer approach to Him, "whom, having not seen, you love;" who wouldest receive the token of his favour; in whom, "though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory^r:" here, at His holy table, you will eat of His bread, and drink of the cup which He had mingled; you will lean on His bosom and sup with Him, and He with you. Bereaved mourner, from whom death shall tear the object of conjugal, filial, or parental affection, here you may come and bring your dead; and over their remains be reminded of Him, "who is the resurrection and the life^s;" and learn that your dead "shall rise again^t," and put on immortality. Children of sorrow, over whose day of life adversity

^o Acts xxvi. 18.

^p Luke vii. 48. 50.

^q Ps. lxxxiv. 3.

^r 1 Pet. i. 8.

^s John xi. 25.

^t Ibid. ver. 23.

has spread a thick and chilling cloud; here, you may come; and some rays of light will break through the cloud, attracting your attention to the heaven, from which they proceed: and you will hope for better joys in the skies beyond, where there is eternal sunshine, and celestial day. How thankful, my Christian friends, should you be to the Almighty for His goodness in giving you a temple, which will offer to you such truths and prospects, such occupations and pleasures, such consolations and joys. Oh! reverence, then, this sanctuary. Love to be in it, and to join in its services. Keep it in its holiness and beauty, and teach your children to reverence it. Leave at its door, when you come to it, whatever may defile it. Henceforth, let nothing be heard in it, but the instructions of religion, and the language of prayer and praise; let nothing be felt in it, but the emotions of penitence, the resolutions of faith, the joys of hope, and the desires and determinations of charity. It is now consecrated to the Most High; and may it be to you, and to your children after you, for many generations, “none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven^u.”

And now, “Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength. Let Thy priests” here “be clothed with righteousness; and let Thy saints sing with joyfulness^x.” “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which Thy people have builded! Yet, have Thou respect unto the prayer of Thy servants, and to their supplications, which Thy servants make before thee this day: That

^u Gen. xxviii, 17.

^x Ps. cxxxii, 8, 9.

Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day;—that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayers which Thy servants shall make towards this place; and maintain the cause of Thy people at all times, as the matter shall require^y.” Let it be a “house of the Lord our God” in this place, because of which, for the purity of its faith, the perfection of its charity, and the holiness of its worship, all people shall seek to do it good^z.

^y 1 Kings viii. 27, &c.

^z Ps. cxxii. 9.

SERMON LXXI.

ON BEHALF OF THE EPISCOPAL SOCIETY*.

ST. MATTHEW, ii. 11.

And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

CHARITABLE institutions are among the peculiar, and most excellent fruits of the promulgation of Christianity. To associate themselves for the instruction of the ignorant, and relief of the wretched; to combine their efforts, in well ordered societies, for the promotion of virtue and happiness among mankind, is a lesson which human beings have learned to practise, chiefly under the influence of the Gospel and their Redeemer. The Infirmary and the Hospital, the Orphan-House and the Dispensary, the School which embraces the children of poverty, and the Society which brings men to the knowledge of God, and practice of virtue, belong exclusively to the Christian era. While this operation of our holy religion may well lead us to admire the benignity of its character, and point out to us the affinity of its spirit to the Spirit of “the Father of mercies^a,” it is productive of incalculable good

* Delivered on the Feast of the Epiphany, 1813; being the Third Anniversary of the ‘Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South-Carolina.’

^a 2 Cor. i. 3.

in our dark and afflicted world. By institutions, to which the Spirit of the Gospel has given birth, more is done in Christendom in a single day, towards instructing the ignorant, relieving the miserable, reclaiming the vicious, and diffusing the knowledge of virtue and immortality, than was done in years, yea, I may say, in centuries, in the regions of heathenism.

I am to address you at this time, my respected hearers, in behalf of a Society, which has had its origin under the influence of this religion, and has for its aim the diffusion of its principles and joys. On this occasion "I think myself happy^b," that I am to address a community distinguished for its liberality in promoting all benevolent purposes; and I do the more cheerfully engage in this duty, on this day of the Epiphany, when the Church leads us to commemorate the removal of the partition, which separated "a peculiar people^c" under the favours of the Almighty from the rest of mankind; and the consequent extension of the revelations, and covenanted mercies of Jehovah, to all the nations of the earth. For who can contemplate the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, and all that is implied in it, without being penetrated with gratitude for this unspeakable mercy, and filled with a desire to have all men partakers of this great salvation? As the Society, for which I speak, is new among you, it will be my duty, in the first place, to make you acquainted with its objects, and the measures by which it hopes to accomplish them.

And you will allow me, in the second place, to bring to your view some of the motives which recommend it to your patronage, and liberal assistance.

^b Acts xxvi. 2.

^c Deut. xiv. 2.

The objects of this Society are implied in the name which it bears. It is for the advancement of Christianity, according to the Protestant Episcopal faith, in South-Carolina. In its views, it embraces nothing but what has respect to the religious prosperity of the community. Its operations are not to be limited to this or that section of the state. Wherever there is ground for the expectation, that its labours may be successful in spreading the truths, and cultivating the virtues of the Gospel, there will its exertions be impartially and disinterestedly made. To the excellent lamps, which the piety of your fathers lighted in many parts of this their habitation, the Society would bring a replenishment of oil; that they may long burn with a revived and steady flame, and shed a strong, and pure, and increasing light. Are there any portions of the state in which, as yet, no such lamps have been placed? Thither would the Society hope, in a course of time to send them; reserving to itself the right, and feeling itself bound by the obligation, to have them in every case formed after the ancient and hallowed pattern of the sanctuary. In short, to extend the knowledge, and increase the influence of the pure and undefiled religion of our Redeemer, as it is received free from the corruptions and additions of men, in the excellent Church to which we belong; these are the objects, to which the Society will devote its labours and care: and this with the truly Christian intention of counteracting the baneful effects of a gloomy and debasing infidelity; of preventing the progress of 'false doctrine, heresy, and schism,' and of bringing those of our fellow beings, who may come within the reach of its beneficence, to a participation of the elevating truths, the consoling promises, and the salvation unto eternal life, which

“ God, who in time past spake unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days” been graciously pleased to communicate “ unto us by His Son^d.”

There are three leading measures, by which it is proposed to pursue these important objects. The first is, by distributing gratuitously, or cheaply, the Holy Scriptures; the Book of Common Prayer; summary and clear views of the evidences of the truth of revelation; and tracts of approved reputation upon the doctrines, sacraments, and virtues of Christianity. In this way, it is presumed, knowledge may be circulated, and attention excited to those truths and duties, which form the basis of all that is precious in man's hopes, and pure in his character. That excellent Society* to which many of their churches in the United States, in the first years of their settlement, owed their ministry, and some of them their existence, found this a most useful measure for propagating the Gospel in the world. They expended in this way much of their funds; and there are many spirits, I doubt not, rejoicing now before the throne of God, who found in the tracts that were thus distributed, the light, directions, and assistance, which guided them to God and to heaven. In this respect, it will be gratifying to the spirit of Americans, to be dependant now for benefits of this kind upon an institution of their own.

Another measure, by which this Society purposes to pursue its important objects, is the selection of youths of genius, and pious disposition, from the retired walks of life, to be educated under its patronage and direction for the services of the Church, in the

^d Heb. i. 1, 2.

* ‘The Society’ in England ‘for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.’

important offices of the ministry. You have not now to be told, that

‘ Many a gem, of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom’d caves of ocean bear ;
That many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’

To procure of these gems, to engrave on them “ Holiness to the Lord^e,” and set them in His temple for light, and for truth; to take of these flowers, and transplant them for use and for beauty into the Church, the garden of God, where man is once more admitted to communion with his Maker, and again bidden to reach forth his hands unto the tree of life, “ and eat, and live for ever^f :” these are purposes of this Society, not less excellent in themselves, than promotive of its important objects. There seem to be peculiar reasons for adopting this measure in this state. The situation of the interior parishes, and the unfriendly action of the climate in one part of the year, upon those who are strangers to it, render it a very desirable thing, that the Church should be furnished with ministers who are natives of the land. A fondness too, it may be presumed, would be excited in favour of such persons: for what country does not look with the strongest affection on its own sons; what people will not have a greater admiration for the excellencies, and a thicker mantle for the imperfections of those, who have the same distinctive name, and civil relations with themselves? It may, moreover, be expected, that Clergymen, who have been brought forward under the patronage of such a Society, will feel upon themselves an increased responsibility, and be actuated by a more ardent

^e Exod. xxviii. 36.

^f Gen. iii. 22.

emulation of every thing honourable and useful in their profession. Nor may we doubt that, upon the worthy ministers whom the Church herself, with pious care, shall have raised for His service, the great Head of the Church will look with peculiar complacency, and bestow His grace and heavenly benediction. It is, therefore, probable, that with the Society, for which I address you, this will be a favourite and most useful measure.

The third measure, by which it would hope to accomplish the great objects of its institution is, the supporting of Missionaries, when its funds shall be adequate, who shall officiate under its direction, in those places where Ministers in that capacity may be found necessary and useful. There are, it would appear, some parishes in which, on account of the want of funds, or of the insufficiency of the population to maintain the ministrations of the sanctuary, the enjoyment of the services of the Church has, in a great measure, passed away. There are also, it would appear, places more recently settled, and others still settling, and with a population destined, in all probability, to be numerous, wealthy, and influential; in which the holy faith, the pure worship, and the admirable order and economy of the Church are entirely unknown.

To the advancement of Christianity in the state, nothing would be more conducive than the employment of Missionaries of irreproachable life, and sound theological attainments, who, at stations assigned them, should preach the Gospel according to the faith, and perform divine service according to the ritual of our own most excellent Church: thus, where the religious opinions of the people are yet to be formed, leading them to a system, than which there is none in the world more pure, more rational, more holy, more promotive of good order in society, more

friendly to the faithful discharge of the social and civil, as well as religious duties of man: where this system has once been enjoyed, but has unhappily disappeared, bringing it back again to the people, by whose ancestors it was cherished, and exciting their affection for it, by a manifestation of its worth, and a patient developement of the benefits of which its operation may be productive.

In each of these ways, the Society purposes to seek the attainment of its great leading objects, the diffusion of the truths, and cultivation of the virtues, of the Gospel of your Redeemer. And is it necessary, that motives should be adduced to recommend it to your favour? No. An institution, which bears on the face of it such strong and unequivocal expression of disinterestedness, benevolence, and piety, asks not the aid of other pleas in its behalf; but establishes for itself a claim to our good will. Yet, you will allow me to bring motives to your view: for motives there are, which will consecrate your deeds; motives, under the influence of which, what is done by you for this Institution shall be a benefit to yourselves. There is not a benevolent intention which is hallowed by a sincere love of our fellow beings, which shall be forgotten before God; there is not "a cup of cold water," given by any man for the sake of Christ, "which shall in any wise lose its reward^g."

The first motive, then, which should induce you to bestow on this Society your patronage and liberal assistance, is drawn from a regard to our blessed Redeemer. When we consider the atonement, which by His own most precious death He hath made for our sins; when we contemplate the light which, by His instructions and example, He hath shed upon

^g Matt. x. 42.

the paths of virtue ; when we think of the aid of the grace of God, which by His mediation He hath purchased for our spirits ; when we look forward to the state of immortality and incorruptible joy, unto which He is anxious to bring us :—who has not his affections drawn out towards this first Benefactor of our race ? what language can express the sum of our obligations to Him ? But how shall we testify our gratitude ? What tokens shall we give Him of our love ? We cannot “ pour upon His head a box of the most precious ointment^h,” we can procure ; nor “ wash His feet with our tears, and wipe them with the hair of our headsⁱ.” We cannot watch with Him while He sorrows, or sleeps ; nor say to Him personally, “ Thou knowest that we love Thee^k ;” “ all that we have is Thine^l.” How, then, shall we manifest, palpably, our affection towards Him ? We must espouse the cause which is dear to Him. We must promote the work, which He desires to see accomplished. And, especially, upon the Church, which He hath taken into so near a connection, as to make it one with Himself, we may bestow tokens of our regard which He will thus receive. The Church He loves. With the Church He hath left the records of His truth, the representatives of His power, and the symbols of His presence. For the Church, as His body, He is constantly interceding in heaven, “ that He may present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing^m.” And if, what is “ done unto one of the least” of the members of this His body, is considered “ as done unto Himⁿ,” with what gracious satisfaction will He behold your gratitude, employed in increasing the general health and vigour of the

^h Matt. xxvi. 7.
Luke xv. 31.

ⁱ Luke vii. 38.
^m Eph. v. 27.

^k John xxi. 15.
ⁿ Matt. xxv. 40.

body ; in “ lifting up its hands which hang down,” and strengthening its “ feeble knees^o ;” and adding by your munificence to its reputation and beauty. You will thus promote, though you cannot now approach His person, what a Prophet hath told us is His dearest recompense, for all that He hath done and suffered for you. “ He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied^p.”

Another motive, which it is my duty to bring to your view, is drawn from a regard to the community. Some religion mankind must have. It would be difficult to discern them in any situation, in which they have not found, or framed for themselves some system of religious belief. Of the importance of a pure and operative faith, and also of a steady and enlightened worship, to the happiness, the order, and the good morals of a people, need I refer you for evidence to the arrangements of the wisest Legislators, the opinions of the best civilians ; or the contrast which is exhibited between the feelings, and manners, which are reputable in the Christian, and those which are reputable in the heathen world ? I need not. The important truth is written in blood, in many parts of the annals of our race ; and if posterity shall not find it upon the first page, they will find it upon the last, of the narrative of the events of our own days. He then, who shall contribute to the advancement of Christianity in his country, will contribute to the formation of her best interests. For, compared with Christianity, every other religion which the world has known, is as the star that glimmers amidst the darkness and clouds of a cheerless midnight, compared with the sun that discloses the beauties and joys of the day. If man must be subject to some religion, who would not

^o Heb. xii. 12.

^p Is. liiii. 11.

have him subject to the Gospel of his Redeemer? This religion, I have already intimated to you, is possessed by the Episcopal Church, under singular advantages. And whether I consider the soundness of its faith, the transcendent purity, holiness and beauty of its liturgy, or the tendency of its ecclesiastical economy to promote that love of subordination which is essential to order, and that unity of action which is essential to prosperity; there seems to me to rest upon every member of it a solemn obligation, arising from the greatness of his privileges, to extend, as far as he is able, the participation of the system, in the enjoyment of which he is so highly favoured of God. Would you do what you can, to promote the religious and moral improvement of man? They can have no better instructions than you may communicate to them in the Gospel; they can offer no purer sacrifices to their Maker, than you may furnish them in the Book of Common-Prayer.

There is another consideration, which I would bring to your view. It has respect to yourselves. "The merciful man," says the author of the sacred Proverbs, "doeth good to his own soul^a." This may refer to the exquisite satisfaction, which ever accompanies the consciousness of having done a benevolent deed: or it may refer to that respect of society, which always waits upon the names and memories of those, whose public exertions or private benefactions manifest, that they love to do good: or it may refer to the payments, which are often made by the most High in this life, of what the faithful in charitable acts lend unto Him^r: or it may refer to the lofty pleasures, to the transcendent rewards, which in the day of retribution shall be given to those, whose benevolent and useful deeds shall have commended them, through the mediation of Jesus,

^a Prov. xi. 17.

^r Ibid. xix. 17.

to the favour of Heaven. If in any, or all of these ways, he who promotes the temporal welfare of his fellow beings, does good unto himself, how much rather he, who directeth his exertions and charities to the promotion of their spiritual and eternal interests! Surely the pillow of that man's death-bed must be smooth, and hope will shed around him the light of her most peaceful countenance, who can perceive in the review of life, that he has done what he could for securing the safety, and extending the blessings of that ark of God, in which are deposited for his human offspring, wisdom, virtue, and everlasting salvation.

Does there arise to check the operation of these motives, the inquiry, what is the necessity of this Institution? The increasing population of the state in parts of it, where the fountains of living water have not yet been set open; the decayed state of the Churches, in which your forefathers, in goodly numbers, once ate with reverence the bread of life; the unhappy influence of scepticism on the one hand, and not less unhappy influence of fanaticism on the other;—will, in the Christian bosom, furnish a sufficient reply.

Does there arise the chilling suggestion, this Society is young, what can it do? Every thing must have its beginning. The majestic river has its origin at a little spring; the cloud which contained the rain that fertilized Samaria, was at first no bigger than “a man's hand^s ;” the intelligence which illumines a nation, had its dawn in the infant hanging upon the breast. Because this Institution is young, we should the more readily and more liberally befriend it.

Does the thought present itself, that the fruits of your beneficence will be gathered in other times?

This is in some degree true. Before the benevolent designs of this Society can be fully realized, its first benefactors will, probably, have been gathered to their fathers. But is there not something sweet in the thought, that while we shall be slumbering in the grave, posterity will be reaping great and important benefits from what we shall have done? Is there not something consoling in the reflection, that the power of death so dreadfully to abridge our connection with the scenes of our affection and usefulness, may, in some measure, be counteracted by this posthumous operation of our works? Much good, it is believed, will immediately ensue from the benevolent exertions of this institution. But it is the expectation of great future benefits to be derived from it by posterity, that will give to your beneficence a more disinterested character; yea, that will assimilate it more perfectly to the beneficence of God. For are not His blessings often bestowed in the sublimest character of goodness, where His hand is unseen and His name unknown?

You see then, my hearers, that this Institution presents itself before you, as an infant friend of your Redeemer. It stretches out its hands to you for your smiles and your help. It says to you, I would be strong, that I might go forth and build up the waste places of the city of God, and bring much people to the enjoyment of His peace and salvation. The spirits of those worthy laymen, who anciently sought the prosperity of the Church in these parts, seem to me to look down upon it from their places of rest, and say; Jehovah prosper you. The spirits of the mild and pious Johnson, of the sensible and dignified Garden*, and of those patient and intrepid

* The Rev. Dr. Johnson, the first President of King's College, New-York; and the Rev. Mr. Garden, the Bishop of London's Commissary in South-Carolina.

clergymen, who, in the difficult years of the settlement of these regions, laboured in the word and doctrine, seem to me to lean from their seats of bliss, and behold with delight the appearance of an Institution, which will take up the work, in which they expended their labours and their lives. The spirits of your fathers, who once worshipped in the temples which are desolate, and whose ashes rest in their cemeteries, seem to me to call to you from the skies, to patronize in their steads this infant advocate of the Church which they loved. Yea, the Spirit of Jesus seems to me to be heard, saying to you from His throne, "Take this child, and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages[†]." Daughters of Jerusalem, love ye your Lord? I know that you love Him. When you have read of the faithful, the happy women who embalmed His body, you have envied them their felicity. To share it with them is not in your power. But He hath a mystical body, the Church. Upon that you may bestow the expressions of your regard for Him. And how can you do it so effectually, as through the instrumentality of this Institution, which, as Joseph cherished in its humiliation His earthly body, would cherish the mystical one in which He delights to dwell? Sons of the Church, love ye your Lord? I trust that ye love Him. When ye behold the wise men coming to-day to bring to Him their "gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh," ye are struck with the grandeur of the scene; and are ready to say to the Author of so much good to our race, Would we could do likewise! To bring your gifts to His presence, who has died that your sins might be pardoned, and is gone into heaven to intercede for you there, is not in your power. But you may bestow

[†] Exod. ii. 9.

your gold, your frankincense, and your myrrh, upon the Church, which is His body. And how can you do it so effectually, as through the instrumentality of this Institution, which, as the angels ministered in the days of His humiliation to His earthly body, would strengthen His mystical one with all the services it can devise. Men and brethren, know ye that the Son of God shall come again from heaven? Assuredly ye have heard it. “ Behold, He cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see Him “ ,” and you also shall stand before Him. And if there shall be found among His attendants, many happy spirits, who shall have been conducted to the knowledge of Him through the beneficence of this Society, would you not exchange the recollection of every earthly vanity for the remembrance, which would enable you to say to the Institution which was instrumental in bringing these to their bliss, I in the days of my flesh gave a portion of my goods ? Go then ; indulge the emotions which the Spirit of God exciteth within you ; and the fruits of which, the recording angel waiteth to enter “ in the Lamb’s book of life “ .” Go ; and as Jacob held the angel with whom he wrestled, hold ye this opportunity fast ; let it not go, until it have blessed you ^y.

^u Rev. i. 7.

^x Ibid. xxi. 27.

^y Gen. xxxii. 26.

SERMON LXXII.

FOR A COLLECTION IN AID OF THE FUNDS OF THE ' PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTH-CAROLINA.'

NEHEMIAH, xiii. 14.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

I AM filled with wonder, my brethren, to behold a mortal man, claiming of the Almighty a remembrance for good, on account of his deeds. Man cannot be too humble before his God. So frail is his nature, and so imperfect are all his performances, that the language which becomes him, when he approaches his Maker, is, " God be merciful to me a sinner ^a." What then are the works, which a mere man, and he a pious and humble man, ventures thus to name to the Eternal God? It is the good Nehemiah who uses this language. What are the deeds, with the remembrance of which we find him solacing himself, and for which he calls upon the Most High to remember him? They were services done for the advancement in his country of the worship of God, and the religious instruction of the people. Jerusalem lay desolate. In the holy temple its services

^a Luke xviii. 13.

were unheard. On the altars no sacrifice was laid, for there was a want of Priests. In the city no Sabbath was hallowed, for the house of God was forsaken. There, where once the Church had been seen in all the grandeur of her Mosaic state; with the Law to instruct, and the Prophets to console her children, and the Ark of the Covenant, from before which was brought to them pardon and peace: now silence and desolation reigned; “the place of the fathers’ sepulchres lay waste, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire^b.” As this excellent man, whose interesting history in the book from which the text is taken, is worthy of your attentive perusal, contemplated the decayed state of the Church of his fathers, he wept. Actuated by a noble zeal for the glory of God, and the religious institutions of his country, he called into action all the resources he could command, that there might be restored to Jerusalem some degree of her former excellence. Were personal services necessary? He went round the walls, surveying their state, and took measures for rebuilding them. Was the co-operation of others wanted, for the accomplishment of his work? He reasoned with the nobles, and rich men, and rulers, till they were interested in the restoration of the order and worship of the house of God. Were contributions needed? All his servants were gathered to the work; and there were sustained daily at his table an hundred and fifty of the Jews, besides heathens, and he gave to the treasury a thousand drachms of gold, and fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty Priests’ garments. His example animated others. There were given by the people to the treasury of work forty thousand drachms of gold, and four thousand and two hun-

^b Neh. ii. 3.

dred pounds of silver, and threescore and seven Priests' garments. By these means the waste places of Jerusalem were rebuilt: where the Sabbaths had been polluted they were now kept holy: Priests in sufficient numbers were procured, and appointed to their stated ministrations: in the temple were again heard the humble prayer, and Psalm of holy praise: the book of the law of the Lord was once more read, and explained in the ears of all the congregation: the sacred feasts, those pleasant remembrancers of God's mercies to the children of men, were revived, and celebrated each in its place: and Jerusalem was seen "shaking herself from the dust^c," and putting on her beautiful garments; while satisfaction and joy filled every bosom, in the hope that the Lord God would again dwell among them. The heart of Nehemiah glowed with delight, as he surveyed the fruit of his labours, and with a complacency which deeds of no other nature would have inspired, he exclaims, with eyes uplifted to the Being to whom we must all give account, "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."

That which strikes me, my brethren, in this passage of holy writ, is the intimation which it plainly contains, that good deeds, done for the houses of our God and for the offices thereof, are peculiarly acceptable in His sight: a doctrine which is confirmed in His holy word, by the expressions of His approbation, received by David and Solomon, and Josiah, and others of the Scripture worthies, on account of their beneficent deeds and pious exertions for promoting the knowledge and worship of His great name.

^c Is. lii. 2.

But why are works of this character so peculiarly acceptable to our Creator? The reasons are obvious, and sufficiently impressive to render us all desirous to have placed to our account, in the book of God, some memorials of good deeds done by us for the advancement of the religion, to the knowledge and fellowship of which He, of His abundant goodness, hath vouchsafed to call us.

It may be observed, first, that all benevolent deeds are pleasing to God. He is love^d; and from age to age, without slumbering or sleeping, is constantly occupied in doing good. When His offspring are engaged in benevolent works, they resemble Him. The greater the extent of their designs, and the more disinterested their motives, the more perfect is this resemblance. And the nearer to perfection the resemblance of Him is brought, in any of His children, the greater must consequently be the complacency, with which He beholds them; the higher the approbation He will bestow upon them. And here it may be remarked, in passing, that deeds done for the advancement of His Church are of the sublimest extent, and most disinterested character. They are of the sublimest extent, for they embrace the interests of unborn generations, and the effects of them endure through eternity. They are of a very disinterested character, for the authors of them expect not to live even to see the fruits of their works. Before incense can arise from the altar, of which he hath contributed to lay the foundation; before the youths whom he hath assisted to educate for the sanctuary, can be clothed with the holy vestments; before the "beauty of holiness" can be seen, or the instruction of Heaven heard in the temple which he hath aided to build; the head of

^d 1 John iv. 16.

^e 1 Chron. xvi. 29.

the charitable man may have been laid to its rest, and his soul have passed to other worlds. Sublime beneficence, which asks not to be known by those, whom it benefits! Its deeds fall like the showers which God sends in the wilderness, where no man is; that He may produce the substances on which the ravens may feed, and replenish the streams at which “the wild asses may quench their thirst^f ;” though neither of them perceive or know the hand that provideth for their life.

But I pass to a higher reason, why the deeds which are done for the advancement of the interests of His Church upon earth, are peculiarly acceptable in the sight of God. Let it be observed, in the second place, that the benevolence, which is thus employed, carries on the great purpose of the Most High, in all His dispensations to this lower world. God has had an end to accomplish, in this part of His dominion, from the beginning of the world: namely, the recovery of the human race from death, and the restoration to them of righteousness and eternal life. To this end the great acts of His government, and His particular providences to the faithful, have all had reference. Whether He be heard in the types of the Patriarchal, or in the sacrifices of the Mosaic economy; whether “He speak in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, or in these last days unto us by His Son^g ;” whether He select “a peculiar people^h ;” and confide to them the oracles of truth; or “break down the middle wall of partitionⁱ ;” and diffuse the revelation of His will among all nations; whether He appoint the expiatory offering to be consumed upon His altar, or give the beloved Son of His bosom to

^f Ps. civ. 11.

^h Deut. xiv. 2.

^g Heb. i. 1, 2.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 14.

bleed upon the cross:—His purpose is one; the object of all these dispensations is the same; the operations of the great moral apparatus, whose parts extend through all portions of time, are to produce one result,—the introduction and establishment of the knowledge of Himself, and of His great salvation; and the renewing of men in their minds “after the image of Him that created them^k.” Has He sent affliction to individuals? Its office and commission has been, to lead them, if they would be docile, into the paths of wisdom. Are the nations of the earth thrown into confusion? His voice is heard amidst the tumult: “I will overturn, overturn, overturn, until He come whose right it is^l” to reign. As the great drama of the events of this world shall be drawing towards its close, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased^m,” and the anthem which shall animate the final scene is, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and everⁿ.” Every effort, therefore, of societies of men, every exertion or benevolent deed of individuals, for establishing and extending the Church, “and the offices thereof,” is a co-operation with the Almighty: a co-operation with Him in promoting the accomplishment of purposes dear to His mind, from before the foundation of the world; and to which He has applied His attributes, devoted His providence, and given “His only begotten Son^o.” How ennobling the thought of being “workers together with God^p.” How strong the obligation upon us to be so, whenever it is in our power. When indeed

^k Col. iii. 10.

ⁿ Rev. xi. 15.

^l Ezek. xxi. 27.

^o John iii. 16.

^m Dan. xii. 4

^p 2 Cor. vi. 1.

I contemplate the Almighty as the rightful owner of all things, who has distributed portions of them as He has seen fit among men, to be used for His glory, and the good of His creatures; and behold His institutions languishing for want of the aid of the talents, or influence, or wealth, which He hath given men: I see not how they, with whom He hath entrusted any of these gifts, can escape the imputation of withholding His own from God: when the state, too, in which He presents to their view the work, which they know He has in hand, indicates His will, that of His own, which He had freely given them, they should offer Him a part for the honour of His name. “Will a man rob God:” said He to His ancient people, when they had suffered the offices of His house to fall to decay; “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings^a” intimating, that to so much of their wealth, as was necessary to the maintenance of His holy institutions among them, He had a claim, which it would be, not merely a want of beneficence, but an act of injustice to Him, not to acknowledge and discharge. Who then would refuse to co-operate with the Almighty, in promoting the knowledge and honour of His name, and the salvation of His human children? Surely of all the works which men may do, deeds of this kind must be peculiarly acceptable to Him; whether they be considered as expressive of our desire, that His pleasure should be accomplished in the world; or as promotive of objects, which He Himself has declared the most important which can be pursued on earth, by making them the subject of His own

^a Mal. iii. 8.

eternal counsels, and end of His wonderful dispensations.

I add in the third place, that in Christians good deeds done for the benefit of His Church are eminently becoming, as a proper expression of gratitude to their Redeemer. Of His claim to your gratitude, it is not necessary for me here to speak. You have not now to be told of His love, nor of the greatness of the salvation He hath wrought for your race. I need not take you to Bethlehem, and show you Him emptied of Divine glory, and for your sakes, entering this miserable world in the humblest form of human existence. I need not conduct you over Judea, and point Him out to you amidst cares and troubles, going about doing good. I need not lead you to the garden of Gethsemane, that you may look upon the unspeakable agony He sustains, while “He bears our griefs, and carries our sorrows;”—“and the Lord is laying on Him the iniquity of us all^r.” I need not ascend Mount Calvary with you, that you may see Him stretched upon the cross, and pouring out His life a ransom for your souls. I need not turn your attention to the sacred volume, and remind you of the blessed instructions in truth and righteousness, which He hath left you. I need not direct the eye of your faith, to the throne of God, that you may behold Him there, still making intercession for you, and sending from thence the “Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever^s.” I need not bid you rise on the wing of holy expectation, and pass to the portals of heaven, and consider the mansions of bliss and immortality, which He hath purchased for you with His blood, and is preparing for your reception, that “where He is,

^r Is. liii. 4, 6.

^s John xiv. 16.

there you may be also^t." No. With these deeds of your Redeemer you are well acquainted, and there are hours, when, overwhelmed with the contemplation of the greatness of His love, you are ready to exclaim, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" But while He is within the vail, presenting before the Mercy Seat His own expiatory blood, and making intercession for us, it is not permitted us to approach His sacred person. But the body of which He is the head, is on earth as well as in heaven. The Church is His body^x. In all its afflictions He is afflicted^y, and in all its prosperities He is rejoiced. Whenever it is exalted, and its interests advanced, He is honoured: and when it is neglected and despised, He is trampled under foot. In their care of its growth, and reputation, and beauty, His disciples express their affection for its head: and whatsoever good deed is done by any man to the least of its members, is done to Him. Yes, blessed Lord, though now we see Thee not, Thou hast left us a way in which we may make some return for Thy unparalleled love. We cannot come to Thee, and wash Thy wounds. We cannot anoint Thy head with ointment. We cannot kiss Thy feet. But we may espouse the cause on earth which Thou, in heaven, art anxious to have accomplished: and the good deeds and gifts which, if Thou wert present, we should come with eager steps to offer unto Thee, we may bestow upon the Church, which Thou hast espoused unto Thyself, and in her Thou wilt receive the offerings of our love. And how great, as well as meet, is the satisfaction which we may af-

^t John xv. 3.

^x Col. i. 24.

^y Job xxiii. 3.

^v Is. lxiii. 9.

ford our Redeemer, by extending the knowledge and influence of His religion. "Is there joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth?" How much more in the bosom of Him, who died that sinners might repent and live? Consider that the enjoyment of the holy Sabbaths; that access to the fountains of Baptism; that the opportunities and means of offering to God acceptable services; that the instructions in righteousness, and tidings of joy, which Christianity furnishes; and that the sacred Supper at which, for the full assurance of our faith, we are upon earth brought nigh unto God, and God is brought nigh unto us; were all procured at the expence of the incarnation, and death of the Son of God. How, if I may speak of Him as a man, who is exalted far above all principalities and powers, how must He be pained, when privileges and blessings purchased by Him for the human race, at such a cost, are but partially enjoyed! What expression of our gratitude to Him can be more becoming and acceptable, than by "good deeds done for the houses of our God, and for the offices thereof," to contribute to the preservation and extension of those principles, institutions, and instructions; without which the Church of His regard would be poor and feeble, and sink into decay; and many of the family, which He died to save, perish "for lack of knowledge," or for the neglect and abuse of it be condemned to utter perdition.

And this leads me to observe in the last place, that good deeds done for the advancement of religion in the world, may well be supposed to be peculiarly agreeable to the Most High; inasmuch as

² Luke xv. 7, 10.

¹ Hos. iv. 6.

they are promotive of the best interests of our fellow beings, His human children. For what is man without the instructions of his Maker? What is his condition, where the light of God's word hath not shined? Shall I speak of him as an individual? "How art thou fallen" from thy original greatness, thou "son of the morning"^b! He wants instruction for his mind, guidance for his affections, restraint for his vices, animation for his virtues, consolation for his sorrows, a sacrifice for his sins, foundation for his hopes, and some staff for his spirit, when he enters "the valley of the shadow of death"^c. It is religion's holy power, that must soften his character, brighten his path, and restore to him the lineaments of the image of God. Shall I speak of him, as joined with his brethren in society? He is destitute of those views of his nature and destiny, which would give elevation to his character, and teach him to respect both himself and his fellow beings. Of the most powerful sanctions of the laws of kindness, and faithfulness, and charity, and truth, he is ignorant or regardless. The passions are without reins, which carry him with desolating impetuosity, over the rights and feelings of others. There is wanting that regard to a future retribution, which hallows and protects all the duties of the social state. How different his character and happiness, when blessed with the religion of Christ, under the benignant influence of which, if it had operation in all its purity and power, "the wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child should lead them"^d: a state, which Almighty God hath taught us, is not to

^b Is. xiv. 10.^c Ps. xxiii. 4.^d Is. xi. 6.

be expected, till the “earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters covers the sea^e.” Shall I speak of him, as a being who has higher interests than the concerns of this fleeting life; whose relations and fortunes extend to other worlds; whose existence is to be eternal? Ah! What an alternative is presented in this the most interesting view! He may rise to “glory and honour and immortality^f” in the kingdom of God; or be driven into “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels^g.” How important to convey to him that “grace of God that bringeth salvation^h” which shows him his duty, and guides him into the path of safety; which reveals to him that Saviour concerning whom we have the assurance of the Almighty, that ‘whosoever liveth and believeth in Him, shall not die eternally.’ In every view which we take of man, the instructions and comforts of Christianity are the best benefits we can provide for him. It is well known to you, that the good deeds, which the merciful do to the bodies of men, are pleasing in the sight of the Almighty. You have heard that they who have fed the hungry, and given drink to the thirsty, and received the stranger, and clothed the naked, and comforted the sick, and visited the prisoner, shall be placed on His right hand, when He cometh to judge the worldⁱ. If these acts of charity to the bodies of men are so pleasing to our heavenly Father, with what high approbation must He behold those, who assist in providing the means, whereby the soul that is hungry may be fed with “the bread which came down from heaven^k,” and the parting spirit have its thirst allayed at the

^e Is. xi. 9.

^f Rom. ii. 7.

^g Matt. xxv. 41.

^h Titus ii. 11.

ⁱ Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

^k John vi. 41.

fountains of life: whereby he who was a stranger to the covenant of promise, may be taken into the congregation of Christ's flock; and the naked soul be protected with the covering of the righteousness of its Redeemer: whereby the heart that is sick with the sense of its sinfulness, may be visited by the Comforter, who will seal to it the overtures of forgiveness and peace; and they who are fast bound in the prison of the adversary, with the chain of their sins, may be set free by that grace, which destroyeth the power of the devil! Deeds of such charity are, doubtless, as delightful works as any which God sees performed by the inhabitants of this our world. Other acts of benevolence affect the perishable, these the immortal, part of men. The comfort which the former afford is limited to this transient state; the benefits of the latter may be felt eternally. On this account it is written; "they that be wise" in understanding the preference of spiritual interests, and making them sure, "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness," by their exertions, their example, or deeds of benevolence, to which the love of Christ, and of men's souls hath constrained them, "as the stars for ever and ever¹."

You see then, my hearers, how great excellence, utility, and hope of the Divine approbation, belong to good deeds done for the advancement among men of religious instruction, and the worship of God. It is to the performance of deeds of this character, that I am now to invite you. The object of the Society, which to-day solicits your aid, is the 'advancement of Christianity in South-Carolina,' after the principles and ritual of our own distinguished

¹ Dan. xii. 3.

Church. This object it would endeavour to accomplish ; by diffusing liberally works of approved reputation upon sacred subjects, placing always at the head of them the Scriptures, and the Book of Common Prayer : by educating young men, who are natives of this country, for the ministry of the Church : and by sending Missionaries of good character to preach the Gospel, and perform the services of the Church, in places where these benefits cannot otherwise be enjoyed. When they cast their eyes upon many spots, where the Church once stood in her glory, they “ think upon her stones, and it pitieth them to see her in the dust^m.” When they add to the view the growing population of the state ; the increasing attention to religious inquiries ; the desire manifested in many places, to have the advantages of public worship ; and the wild fanaticism which is spreading itself in some quarters, and is as little likely to honour the character as to produce the fruits of true religion:—they perceive that “ the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are fewⁿ ;” and are compelled by the insufficiency of their funds for the extent of their work, to call upon you to aid their exertions, that “ labourers may be sent forth into the harvest.” Of this charity there is a view, which upon my mind is so impressive, that I cannot but persuade myself it will fill you with joy, in an opportunity to contribute to the accomplishment of its purposes. Suppose that our blessed Redeemer stood amongst us, and asked of you an alms ; an alms to assist Him in carrying on the work, upon which He came down from heaven, the enlightening, reforming, and saving of mankind. Do I deceive myself, when I imagine you hastening to Him

^m Ps. cii. 14.

ⁿ Luke x. 2.

with holy love, with fervent devotion, and emptying all your treasures at His feet? From the meek and beneficent Jesus, the most dissolute, I am sure, would not turn away without offering Him a portion of his possessions. The language of His disciples would be, "All that we have is Thine °." But, my brethren, the necessities of the Gospel are His necessities. When His religion solicits your aid, it is He that speaks. Societies for diffusing the blessings of His Church, present the same object which He would propose. "Inasmuch," says He, "as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me^p." And what can we do, concerning which our God will be so likely to remember us? What acts are more meet, in the days of your prosperity, than "good deeds done for the house of your God, and for the offices thereof?" Of what works will the recollection be more solacing in the seasons of your adversity, than of "good deeds done for the house of your God, and for the offices thereof?" To what transactions of your life will you look back with more pleasure, when you shall be entering the vale of death, than to "good deeds done for the house of your God, and for the offices thereof?" What works can you be more desirous to have rehearsed concerning you in the day of judgment, than "good deeds done" upon earth "for the house of your God, and for the offices thereof?" Give then, ye rich; that of the abundance which He hath given you, a portion may be used to the honour of His name. To the treasury of this work offer your contributions, ye gay and thoughtless, if haply, amidst your omissions of duty and trans-

° Luke xv. 31.

^p Matt. xxv. 40.

gressions of His laws, the Almighty may remember you for this. And you, lovers of Christianity ; who, if its Author were to put to you the question which He put to His Apostle, “ Lovest thou Me ? ” would reply with a zeal not less than his : “ Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee ; ” —assist by your oblations to “ feed His sheep, and feed His lambs¹. ” Jesus, from His throne, looks down to-day, to behold the measure of our beneficence. Christians, will ye refuse to gratify your Redeemer ?

¹ John xxi. 15—17.

SERMON LXXIII.

—
FAST SERMON.
—

JEREMIAH, xviii. 7, 8.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

THE vicissitudes which create, which alter, and which destroy countries and communities, are among the most interesting occurrences of our globe. In them we feel a lively interest as men, and have naturally a desire to ascertain the spring of their movements, and the principles, according to which those movements are governed. The Scriptures abound with passages, which furnish information upon this subject; and contain the only instruction capable of solving the difficulties in which it is frequently enveloped. The text is one of a great number of declarations, from which the man, who is engaged in observing the events of the world, or is alarmed by the tendency of the awful phenomena of nature, or concerned for the vicissitudes of his own country, may obtain that knowledge which should, at once, satisfy his inquiry, and render him humble and virtuous. “At what instant I shall

“speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

These words suggest to us in the first place, that the being and condition of countries and communities, of nations and kingdoms, are under the control of the Most High.

Secondly, that the great procuring cause of perplexities and afflictions, calamities and ruin, in any section of the earth, is the predominance of irreligion and vice.

And thirdly, that by timely reformation, a people may avert the evils, which on account of their sins the Almighty may have pronounced against them.

These three most interesting truths are evidently contained in this portion of the sacred writings: and they strike me as peculiarly proper for your present meditation.

That the fate and events of countries and communities are in the hands of God, is almost a necessary consequence of His being and character. That He has created a world, and then abandoned it to the government of chance, is a supposition so repugnant to the idea of any purpose in creating it; so incompatible with all His known attributes; so contradictory to every reasonable sentiment of a God; that it is utterly inadmissible. To suppose Him watchful of the operations in the universe, and yet not active in the management of them, would seem irreconcilable with the inefficacy of all laws without His might; with the appearance of design in most events; with the effects of a sublime power which many of them display; and with the existence, on peculiar occasions, of some occurrences which have

been departures from the ordinary course of nature. To believe any affairs to be under the guidance of His providence, and yet to imagine that the fortunes of whole countries and people are free from His observation and care, would be inconsistent with the variety and magnitude of the interests, which are in those fortunes always involved. If then there be a God, there is a supreme Providence. For can we believe Him all-powerful, wise and good, and yet regardless of His works? Are there not events, for which we can in no way satisfactorily account, but by referring them to His special exertion? If there be a Providence, it is concerned always about the condition and events of nations and kingdoms. For can any objects more need His attention, or be more suitable for His care? Does He cause the grass to grow upon the mountains, and number the hairs of our heads, and at the same time neglect those occurrences in the physical, and social world, with which are generally connected the safety, the happiness, and the improvement of millions of His intelligent creatures; with which are often connected the progress of civilization, virtue, and religion; yea with which is sometimes connected that display of His own glory, for which all things “are and were created^a?” These sentiments are confirmed by their having been common to all mankind. The poets of remotest antiquity represent their heroes, as seeking by sacrifices and libations the protection of the gods, when marching to battle; or their intervention when assailed by plagues. The disciples of imposture and of ignorance have recourse to the intercession of their prophet and their Bramins, for distinguishing favours, or the averting of awful calamities. And

^a Rev. iv. 11.

the best rulers of the most enlightened times have deemed it rational and useful to direct their thoughts, and the thoughts of their people, to the God of heaven in seasons of alarm and danger. Above all, they are sentiments which are rendered unquestionable, by the authority of the sacred volume. In the Scriptures the Almighty is explicitly represented, as superintending all the wonderful occurrences in the natural, political, and moral world. They expressly teach that an arm of flesh, and a bow of steel, are destitute of strength, when He bids them be relaxed; that peace and war operate in the manner which He permits, during the period which He limits, and in the sphere which He assigns: that the blessings which prosper, and the calamities which deject communities, are sent by Him, and by Him recalled: that “the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, are His four sore judgments^b :” that the thunder, and the earthquake, and great noise, and the storm, and tempest, and flame of devouring fire, are visitations of the Lord of Hosts: that the elements of nature are His ministers, to perform His purposes. If we do not reject the sacred volume, we must believe that every people is with God, as a vessel of clay in the hands of the potter, which he baketh, and marreth, and maketh again according to his pleasure, and the uses for which it is designed^c. In the history of His “peculiar people^d,” we see Him regulating their movements, aiding or frustrating their purposes, and achieving their exploits. And in the sublime passage which now guides our meditations, He with a majesty of language, scarcely surpassed in any other portion of the holy books, represents the fate of countries as

^b Ezek. xiv. 21.^c Jer. xviii. 4.^d Deut. xiv. 2.

determined by His word. “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it.”

But it may be objected, if it is thus certain that the events of time are under the superintendance of God, why are there so great evils both in the natural and political world? Why does the earthquake terrify and devastate whole cities and countries in some regions, and war deluge others with blood? Why is ‘ the arm of abused power’ ever successful, and unprincipled violence seen triumphing over prostrate man? To this it would be sufficient to reply, that in us beings of yesterday, who see but a few links of the vast chain, in which the Almighty hath connected all occurrences in the universe; who with the utmost effort of our faculties are unable, in this our low position, to perceive the final results of any of His operations; it is presumptuous, vainly presumptuous to attempt to fathom the counsels of His mind; and worse than presumptuous, with the evidences which He hath vouchsafed to give us in His word and works, of His wisdom, goodness, and rectitude, to doubt that all His arrangements will terminate to the honour of His government, and the greatest possible benefit of His creatures. As the objection however is plausible, it may be well to observe further, that our estimate of what appears to be evil may often be erroneous. There are certainly reasons for apprehending, that in the vicissitudes of this disordered world, the course is taken by Divine providence, which, upon the whole, is best; and ‘ all partial evil, universal good.’ Thus though the earthquake, or the whirlwind may destroy a city, and both be made instruments by the Almighty of executing His vengeance upon a guilty people, they may nevertheless be necessary to the safety,

the durability, and the salubrity of the globe they disturb.

‘ The winter is as needful as the spring,
 The thunder as the sun ; a stagnant mass
 Of vapours breeds a pestilential air.
 Not more propitious the Favonian breeze
 To nature’s health, than purifying storms.
 The dread volcano ministers to good ;
 Its smothered flames might undermine the world.’

Somewhere, I know not where, I have seen it with striking force and beauty asked, whether the insect, whose habitation the ploughshare overturns, knows that its motions conduce to that fertility of the earth, which is to sustain many intelligent creatures ? In like manner, from the convulsions and terrible occurrences in the moral world, there may be educed by the Being, who bringeth good out of evil, such results as will advance His purposes, and the general welfare. ‘ The arm of abused power,’ as in the case of the Assyrian monarch, may be used by Him as a scourge, in executing His anger upon the nations whom He would chastise ; though it may be an object in itself of Divine abhorrence, and destined, in manifestation of the Divine holiness, to be itself finally broken. Evils there are in the world. They are to be looked for in a world inhabited by sinners, and labouring under a curse. But we have no reason to believe, that they are not the least evils of which existing circumstances would admit. We know that they shall all be bent by God, to promote the accomplishment of His pleasure, in the manifestation of His glory, and the final triumph and reward of truth and goodness. Could the state and character of the people who have hitherto been, be accurately known, for myself I cannot doubt, that the proportion of the measure of their real happiness, and the degree

of their purity and virtue, would be found sufficiently just, to vindicate the agency of the great moral Governor in their respective allotments.

This brings us to the second truth contained in the text ; namely, that the great cause of perplexities and troubles, calamities and ruin, in any region, is the predominance of corrupt principles and manners. For the evils which the Divine providence sends upon the world, there can be no other cause than the transgressions of the inhabitants thereof. If we look into the volume of revelation, the best guide to a knowledge of the principles of the Divine government, we shall learn, that “ He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men^e.” The Scriptures again and again represent the calamities of a people, as the punishment of their sins. “ O Israel, thou hast fallen by thine iniquity^f.” “ Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you^g.” “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them^h.” “ Thou didst march through the land in indignation, Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.—Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neckⁱ.” “ In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red ; it is full mixed, and He poureth out of the same. As for the dregs thereof, all the ungodly of the earth shall drink them, and suck them out^k.” “ Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them ; and this house, which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out

^e Lam. iii. 33.

^f Hos. xiv. 1.

^g Jer. v. 25.

^h Jer. xviii. 9, 10.

ⁱ Hab. iii. 12, 13.

^k Ps. lxxv. 9, 10.

of My sight :—and every one that passeth by it shall be astonished,—and they shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and to this house ? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord their God,—and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them : therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this evil¹.” Famine, pestilence, the sword, conflagration, earthquakes, tempests, and all the public calamities, are mentioned in the Scriptures as ministers of vengeance, calling upon the people to whom they are sent, to observe the tokens of Divine displeasure, and consider their ways. So strong is the language of inspiration upon this point, that it represents the Deity as constrained by His holiness, to execute His judgments upon a land laden with iniquity. “ Shall I not visit for these things ? saith the Lord : and shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this^m ? ”

Nor is reason less explicit upon this truth, than revelation. Upon a little reflection she perceives that the Almighty, being perfectly holy, wise, and good, will approve and encourage virtue. This necessarily implies the condemnation and punishment of vice. In beings destined to exist hereafter, there is extensive opportunity for the fulfilment of the Divine intentions. Their immortality opens a wide field for the display of the justice of God. And hence it is, that in this present state vice does not always in the individual meet its retribution, nor virtue its reward. But nations and communities, as such, are not immortal. At their dissolution they are annihilated. In a state of after responsibility; we have no reason to think they will ever exist. It should, therefore, seem reasonable that they should

¹ 1 Kings ix. 7—9.

^m Jcr. v. 9.

in their present existence enjoy the rewards due to their virtues, and endure the punishments which their vices deserve. If their fortunes and fate be subjects of the Divine providence, He doubtless applies to them the principles of His moral government. And under the application of these principles, shall not the thoughtless “fear Thee, O Lordⁿ?” shall not the ungodly be afraid?

To place the point beyond dispute, experience, weeping as she reviews her venerable annals, declares from them that the indignation of Heaven has frequently been brought upon whole communities by their sins: that debasement, calamity, and ruin have resulted to them from the predominance of depraved principles and manners. She points to the “cities of the plain^o,” “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire^p :” and a sigh escapes from her lips, as she repeats the cause of their destruction; that ten righteous men could not be found in them^q! She turns to an earlier page, and looks aghast upon the ravages of the Flood; and when it is inquired, wherefore did the Almighty bring this dreadful convulsion upon His earth, and desolation upon His creatures; she proclaims, that “all flesh had corrupted his way^r” before Him. She directs your attention to the chosen people, and shows you them now visited with pestilence, now languishing in captivity; now terrified with awful phenomena in their country, now scourged with war; now having “the wisdom of their wise men perished, and the understanding of their prudent men hid^s ;” now having the fruit of their labours wasted, by “blasting and mildew^t,” by “the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm^u ;”

ⁿ Rev. xv. 4.

^o Gen. xiii. 12.

^p Jude, 7.

^q Gen. xviii. 32.

^r Ibid. vi. 12.

^s Is. xxix. 14.

^t Deut. xxviii. 22.

^u Joel ii. 25.

now seeing “the cities, the places of their fathers’ sepulchres, laid waste, and the gates thereof consumed with fire^x :” and in all the seasons of their calamities, she shows you the demons of idolatry, turning them from their God; or uncommon profligacy rendering them unfit for His mercies. She places herself upon the mouldering relics of cities, once great and fair; upon the territories of empires, once splendid and mighty: and, as she looks upon the gloomy vestiges of their destruction, demands, Were piety and purity here when these desolations came? was holiness buried in these ruins? She stretches out her hand to direct your eyes to Jerusalem, even “the city of the great King^y ;” she reminds you of the ingratitude, the unbelief, the hypocrisy, the licentiousness, and hardheartedness of the people by whom it was inhabited: and while you survey with horror creeping over your senses its most remarkable desolation, she writes with a pen dipped in the fount of inspired knowledge, that the Almighty “hath not done without cause all that He hath done in it^z.” Thus do revelation and reason and experience, the three great guides to knowledge, unite in their testimony, that “righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach” and destruction “to any people^a.”

This leads us to the last point of observation, that by a timely reformation of their principles and lives, communities may avert the displeasure of the Almighty. Contrition is estimable, and acceptable through the Redeemer, in an individual. It has turned away the wrath of Heaven from many an offender. But when a community, as one body, is roused by a sense of danger, or by the calls of the Most

^x Neh. ii. 3.

^a Ezek. xiv. 23.

^y Ps. xlviii. 2.

^z Prov. xiv. 34.

High, in alarming occurrences, in foreign examples, or in His holy word, or by their own consciousness of a relaxed state of religion and morals, to “consider their ways^b,” and turn with sincerity to God, to humble themselves before Him, and to express their earnest desire to be made objects of His forgiveness and favour: if ever He may be said to be taken with holy violence, it is by such an act. “Rend your heart,” says He, “and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil^c.” Of the efficacy of such repentance examples are not wanting. In the history of the Jews, a people selected, I conceive, among other reasons, that in them might be exemplified to all the nations of the earth the rules and method of the Divine government, as it concerns them; we find that as their departure from the commandments of God subjected them to divers calamities, so their return to truth and obedience averted the evils which were pronounced against them, and obtained the Divine favour. And how great, how affecting is the example, which is presented to your view, in one of the Lessons which have been read. Nineveh, that great, and wealthy, and splendid city, had become dreadfully irreligious and dissolute. Ruin was in awful indignation pronounced against it. “Yet forty days,” the Prophet was commanded to proclaim, “and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be

^b Hag. i. 5.

^c Joel ii. 13.

proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing : let them not feed, nor drink water : but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God : yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not ? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way ; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them ; and He did it not ^d." But why should I multiply examples ? " God is not a man, that He should lie ^e : " and He hath given us express assurances of the efficacy of humiliation and amendment, to turn away His wrath. With the text before us, we can need no other quotations : " At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil, that I thought to do unto them."

I have detained you too long, my hearers, upon these important topics, to be able, without wearying you, to dwell upon the many instructive inferences which they would sustain. You will indulge me however with observing, that they place before you in a striking view, the propriety of that act of your Chief Magistrate, which has assembled us in this holy place : and that they offer you the most powerful inducements to keep such a Fast, as the Lord hath chosen. Our age seems to be an awful era, in which the Almighty hath spoken, " to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy" many nations of the earth.

^d Jon. iii. 4—10.

^e Numb. xxiii. 19.

Our country has not had little cause to be alarmed, lest of the cup of His wrathful displeasure she also should be called to drink. The skirts of those clouds which darken Europe have been seen rising on the edge of our horizon. Thunders, and earthquakes, and great noises; storms, and tempests, and the flame of devouring fire, those ministers of alarm which come from the Most High in mercy, as well as in judgment, have been in an unusual manner visiting our land. And “the voice of His word^f” has proclaimed in our temples His standing admonitions, that though “He is gracious and long-suffering, He will by no means clear the guilty^g.” Of the strange events, both in the natural and moral world, which mark this age, we should make the use to which rational beings, and especially Christians, should convert them; to lead us to religious reflection, and godly fear; to check us in our inconsiderate practices, and turn us from the error of our ways “to the wisdom of the just^h.” It is not, however, by the formality of a day’s humiliation, that we shall recommend ourselves to God, but by minds purified by faith, and lives distinguished for virtue. Let us then bring every one his erroneous principles, his vicious dispositions, his criminal practices, and his dissolute manners, and sacrifice them on the altar of his country’s preservation. Let us in the several spheres of our influence, discountenance the profanation of the Sabbath, the neglect of the institutions of Christianity, and all that corruption of sentiment and manners, which is as little promotive of man’s present happiness, as it is sure to produce his everlasting destruction. Let us unbend the heavy burdens, and deal our bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with a garment,

^f Ps. ciii. 20.

^g Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^h Luke i. 17.

and not hide our face from our own flesh¹. Above all, as we love our own safety, and the happiness of posterity, and the honour of our God and Redeemer, let us endeavour to check the extension of those sceptical tenets and habits, which made David afraid. While we see the Almighty shaking the earth in His majesty, “ making bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations^k,” and stretching out the rod of His power over this guilty world, let us hearken to the words, which, as He bends to execute His judgments over the creatures of His hand, do yet proceed from His gracious lips, “ O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever¹!”

¹ Is. lviii. 6, 7.

^k Is. lii. 10.

¹ Deut. v. 29.

SERMON LXXIV*.



PUBLIC THANKSGIVING.



PSALM, c. 4.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

WE are assembled to day at the call of our civil Rulers, to offer an annual tribute of praise and thanksgiving, to the ever blessed God. ‘Very meet and right’ it is, ‘and our bounden duty,’ thus, as a people, to adore and magnify the great and benevolent Author of our national, domestic, and individual privileges. Blessings which we socially enjoy require a social acknowledgment. Mercies which are publicly bestowed demand a public expression of praise. This you have learned from the Scriptures. Your reason and the authority of your Church approve it. And you are met together, I trust, with that undissembled gratitude, which may perfume the incense that is at this moment rising from so many altars in this part of our common country.

In no way can I more properly lead your meditations, or more fully set before you our obligations

* Preached at Newport, Rhode-Island, previous to 1809.

to honour and praise the Almighty, than by enlarging upon the blessings, set forth in the proclamation, as requiring our grateful and devout acknowledgments.

In the first place, we are called upon to render thanks to 'the Author and giver of every good gift,' that our country has enjoyed peace, and freedom, and their happy fruits, while the nations of the earth have been convulsed by wars and violence, and deluded and oppressed by the cupidity and ambition of wicked men. Peace and freedom are among the choicest blessings which Heaven can bestow upon a nation. Alas! What people have justly appreciated them till they were gone? Without them small is the enjoyment of any other blessing. Property is not safe, improvement languishes, the smiles of comfort, and the carols of joy, cease: the endearing charities of life yield not their customary delight: humanity loses its bland control over the hearts of men, when the peace and freedom of a country are destroyed. Even the kind voice of religion is lost in the din of contention, and her benevolent hand palsied, in the manacle of servitude. War and slavery! They are among the sores and curses which an angry God inflicts upon the earth, when He would chastise its degenerate inhabitants. In its preservation from these evils, our country has hitherto been peculiarly favoured by the Almighty. We live in an eventful period of the world. Our age is an age of tribulation to a great part of the earth. We have seen a war of uncommon terror, sprung from monstrous parents, and uncontrolled by any principle of honour or right, sent forth to ravage the most civilized portions of the globe. Early it fed upon the ruins of every thing great and sacred. It demolished the weak, and dismayed the powerful. It prowled for plunder, even into the

hallowed abodes of religion. It spared not the peaceful recesses of the arts. It had, at length, returned to the den from which it came, spiteful as a wounded tiger, and covered with the blood of innocence and virtue. The humane were wishing that there it might expire, either of its surfeit, or of its dreadful exertions. But it is again let loose. Europe trembles at its approach. The nations of the earth observe its movements with wonder. Grown stronger by rest, and more ravenous by confinement, who can foresee the extent and end of its devastations? They are known only to that omniscient God, who 'maketh peace, and createth war,' and by whom alone "the remainder of wrath can be restrained".

Melancholy, in the course of this tumultuous period, has been the fate of many happy and interesting people. The great and splendid nation, with whom these confusions originated, relinquished her hold on all her ancient establishments in an infatuated pursuit, through the blood of the best and worst of her sons, after what the unprincipled and aspiring had persuaded her was Liberty. But she mistook a cloud for the goddess; and for her rashness has been doomed, as yet, to turn unceasingly in a mazy wheel. Nor is *her* loss of freedom to be chiefly deplored. Unfortunate Belgium; ill-fated Poland; unhappy Swiss; deluded Genoese, we mourn more for you. The genius of your countries is fled, we know not whither! Your fortunes will be remembered by nations in far distant ages, as solemn cautions to trust no friend who has discarded all principle, and rely upon no earthly power which promises to give, what it must first destroy.

While we are thus led by the proclamation, to

advert to the dealings of Providence towards the nations of the earth; the contemplation of their calamities should increase our gratitude, for the peace and civil privileges which we are permitted to enjoy. If we have in our country any hard-earned wealth which might be plundered; if there be in it any virtue which might be oppressed; or infancy and age which might unresistingly bleed; if there be any chastity which might be ruined; or domestic joys which might be torn from us; if we have any altars which might be demolished, or temples which might be defiled:—then have we reason to bless and adore the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, that our nation has not been involved in the horrors and miseries of the war, which has desolated, and still threatens to desolate the most populous parts of the globe. The skirts of its clouds have once and again been curling towards our shores, but His gracious breath hath turned them away. How long this shall be the case we are unable to say. But this we know, that His good providence can restrain the provocations and injuries of misguided, or designing powers; and that the way to deserve a continuance of our peace and freedom, is to be grateful to God, that we have hitherto enjoyed them, and to use them soberly, in advancing His glory, and the virtue and happiness of our species.

Again. We are called upon by the proclamation to render thanks to God, that though He has seen fit to visit some of our cities with pestilence, He has stayed the hand of the destroyer, and not suffered the people to be destroyed utterly. When Moses rehearsed to the chosen people the blessings which they had received of the Most High, he led them to consider in their hearts, that “as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord their God had

chastened them^b.” Awful indeed is the minister of death, which has “walked in darkness^c,” through many parts of our land. But is there not a cause? Alas! there are spots upon thy garments, my country; thou hast departed from thy purity. A little reflection will convince us, that if the Deity, in a national view, regards the character and conduct of a people, we have deserved heavy dispensations at His hand. Has our country exhibited that scene of harmony, sobriety, and order; of chastity, righteousness, and piety, which a country so favoured and enlightened ought to exhibit? Our consciences tell us it has not. Though we have been blessed with the purest, and most perfect combination of freedom with government, we have been factious and dissatisfied. Though the Almighty has raised up for us a host of worthies, as great and good as ever protected and adorned a nation, we have mistrusted and slandered them. A spirit of calumny and contention, vices of the blackest hue, has prevailed, when quietness and deference to superior wisdom, when love and charity and concord should have been our delight. Though we are distinguished by the presence of religion in its most uncorrupted state, we have not entertained it with that affection and respect, which such a guest from the courts of heaven deserves. Our ears have sometimes turned from the voice of the charmer, to listen to the blandishments of a dissolute philosophy. We have harboured the works, and honoured the patrons of infidelity. When with indignant faith we should have shaken the viper from our hands, we held it, and pressed it to the bosom of our country; and entirely owe it to the grace and protection of the

^b Deut. viii. 5.

^c Ps. xci. 6.

Almighty, that its venom has not poisoned the whole body. Though we have been prospered in our agricultural, commercial, and mechanic pursuits, beyond all example, we have forgotten the God who giveth power to get wealth. His sabbaths are profaned, and his laws neglected. We have yielded ourselves to luxury and effeminacy; and there is cause to fear, that the mass of the community are much more intent upon securing to themselves vain and polluting pleasures, than upon honouring their Creator, and obtaining a place in His kingdom. Under these circumstances, instead of murmuring that He hath visited us with pestilence, we have reason to exclaim, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed^d." He hath indeed chastened us, but not according to our sins. In the midst of judgment, He hath remembered mercy. In some towns, and particularly in our own, He hath greatly blessed the exertions of the citizens to arrest in its progress the insidious disease. In others, He has excited a spirit of compassion and benevolence towards the wretched sufferers, and thus has converted the affliction into an occasion of calling into action some of the choicest virtues of the human heart. And when all hearts were failing them for fear, He hath been ready to hear our prayers, and hath graciously called to the destroying angel, "It is enough: stay now thine hand^e." For this restoration of health to the mourning cities of our land, praise should wait upon our God in Zion. We who escaped from peril; we, who live while many more virtuous and useful than ourselves are perished, should bless the God of our health, and sing of His righteousness.

Further. We are exhorted in the proclamation

^d Lam. iii. 22.

^e 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

to render thanks to God, for the provision which has been made for the sustenance of man and beast. In no country, perhaps, are the seasons and the elements more friendly to man, than in this which we inhabit. While there is occasion enough for the toils of the husbandman, to keep him in the wholesome habits of industry, his labour receives, generally, a sure and sufficient reward. Seldom does the hurricane blast his prospects, or famine stalk over his fields, spreading dismay. The seasons perform their round in constant and beautiful order, and harvest brings with its generous countenance, the causes of thanksgiving and festivity. When we advert to the occurrences of the year past, and observe the dreadful Tornado laying some places waste, and in others, the earth yawning and swallowing up multitudes alive, with what thankful hearts should we bless the Lord, for this good land which He hath given us.

Unwearied too is the Almighty in His active munificence. He rides forth gloriously in the sun; He descends silently in the dew; by the influence of His power He secretly fertilizes the earth, that "all things living may be filled with plenteousness^f." There is something sublimely affecting in the thought, that though infinitely happy in Himself, this great and glorious Being is constantly engaged in providing the nourishment, and promoting the joy of His extensive family. Amongst us He has not left Himself without witness. Although He gave not His rain in the usual abundance, yet has the fig-tree blossomed, and fruit has been in the vine; the labour of the olive has not failed, and the fields have yielded meat; the flocks are not cut off from the fold, and there are herds in the stall. To

^f Ps. cxlv. 16.

abuse these bounties of the Almighty, or even to receive them without discerning and adoring His munificent hand, would be to make ourselves utterly unworthy of them. The heathens had their offering to Ceres. The Jews waved their first fruits before Jehovah. And unworthy are the people to be called Christians, who feel no gratitude, and express no praise, when the benevolent Creator hath "crowned the year with His goodness^g."

Another cause for which we are exhorted to give thanks is, that the means of education are extended and multiplied. In any region it is pleasant to behold, and honourable to promote, the expansion and improvement of the faculties, with which man is endowed. But in countries like ours, this is a thing of very great importance. It is equally true that a people must be ignorant, before they can be quietly enslaved, and that they must be well informed, before they can enjoy freedom. Hence in some of the ancient republics, the education of the rising generations was made a public care. And hence under all republican governments, the cultivation of the mind and manners, the diffusion of knowledge and civilization, is a matter of primary consequence. It must therefore afford pleasure to every patriotic American, to behold the seminaries of learning multiplied, and the means of education facilitated, in all parts of his yet infant country. Of such great importance are our schools, Academies, and Colleges, and so rapidly do they increase, that we may apply to them a prophecy which related originally to a much higher blessing. "The wilderness, and solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall," through them, "rejoice, and blossom as the rose^h." There is perhaps

^g Ps. lxxv. 12.

^h Is. xxxv. 1.

no place upon our globe in which an ordinary education is more generally acquired, or acquired with more facility, than in New-England. It is humiliating, however, to confess, that in this our state this momentous subject has received little public attention. We live in a town in which there are upwards of seven thousand inhabitants, and consequently many poor and some rich: and yet we behold not in it, a single school free to the children of all classes, and supported by common consent. The speaker would not willingly be thought to intrude upon departments, which do not belong to him. But conceiving that morals and true religion, as well as the preservation of freedom and national prosperity, are very dependant upon education, he would be negligent of his duty, if he did not avail himself of the opportunity to deplore the indifference to so important a subject in this little portion of his country. At the same time it is highly gratifying, and a cause for great thankfulness to God, that the diffusion of knowledge is so general, and the means of education so extended and multiplied in the land, as to render the good sense of the people, the final dependance of those, who calculate the variations of public opinion, and the possibilities of future events. This is as high an encomium as can be passed upon a nation; and we know of but one evidence so great, that it is highly favoured of the Lord.

Which brings us to the last and crowning blessing, for which the proclamation calls upon us to give thanks; namely, that the Book of divine truth is open before us, and that we read and hear the glad tidings of salvation. Some religion every associated people upon earth must possess. It is a pillar, without which no civil society can stand. How happy are we in having a religion, which

reaches the heart; whose awful sanctions affect the ruler as well as the subject; which rests upon the bias of its reasonableness, and its evidences; and compared with whose adaptation to the necessities and wishes of man, the properties of all other religions betray their origin, and insufficiency. The Gospel is the choicest blessing, which God has bestowed upon the inhabitants of this miserable world. In our national capacity, it is the best safeguard of the subject's rights, and the strongest security of the magistrate's fidelity; it is the surest source of public virtue, of order, of elevated habits and manners; and it is the most precious pledge of Divine favour. To each of us, in our individual capacity, who can estimate its worth? It "is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our pathⁱ;" it is the balm of our sorrows, and the staff of our hopes; as an angel from heaven, cheering us on our way, it guides us through the perplexed and thorny paths of this unsatisfactory life, to a state of rest, and glorious immortality. This Gospel we enjoy in its purest state. No sword inculcates its authority; no stake explains its doctrines. It comes to us, as it came from Jesus, in the dignity of its own truth, and in the power of its own efficacy. Happy for us, if we faithfully appreciate its value. Yea, happy for our country beyond calculation, if neglect of its principles, or contempt of its Author, do not cause it to be taken away, nor impaired with human corruptions.

Such, my brethren, are the blessings for which we are assembled to praise the Author and giver of them all. "Great," indeed, "is the sum of them^k." What return shall we make unto the Lord for His goodness? wherewith shall we repay His love?

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 105.

^k Ibid. cxxxix. 17.

Alas ! we have nothing which we can give Him, but our hearts ; we have nothing to offer Him but our imperfect services.

We are bound, with gratitude and praise, to attribute our blessings to their true source, the loving kindness of our heavenly Father. This we do in the act of thanksgiving, if our hearts originate what our lips express. And in the grateful overflow of praise to your Maker, you will manifest your sincerity, by beneficence to His children. While with decent festivity, and temperate pleasure, you enjoy the viands of the day, a Christian joy will not suffer you to be unmindful of those to whom the relics of your loaded boards will be a welcome feast.

Next to praise, and essential to it, is steady reverence of the Most High. This you will manifest nationally by the public protection, and liberal support, of His word and institutions ; by preferring the unchangeable principles of His law to all human policy and immoral expedients ; by advancing none to offices of honour and trust, especially to stations so elevated as that which the providence of God has made vacant in this state, who in principle or in practice despise His word and disregard His name ; and above all, by aspiring after such a national character, as we can believe He will approve. In your individual capacities, you will manifest it by being uniformly righteous before Him ; “ walking in all His commandments and ordinances blameless¹.”

Finally. Whether we consider the character of the Deity as pourtrayed in His works and judgments, and revealed in His word ; or contemplate our own situation with regard to our physical, so-

¹ Luke i. 6.

cial, and moral state, the greatest cause of joy we have is found in the truth, that God is the Governor of the world. It is our staff; the anchor of our souls; our only rational ground of safety, contentment, and happiness. The contemplation of it should fill us with holy enthusiasm, and the remembrance of it incite us to exclaim with the Royal Psalmist, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful unto Him, and bless His name."

SERMON LXXV.



ON DEATH.



JOB, vii. 16.

I would not live always.

THERE is nothing to which human nature is more averse, than to dissolution. Death presents himself to the imagination of every man, clothed with terrors. He finds in most men feelings that recoil at his approach, and thoughts that regret his existence. Except the few, whom religion hath made “immoveable^a,” and the few whom sorrow hath rendered desperate, all men are prone to look upon death, as the greatest of all terrestrial evils. Yet, it is an event which to every man is unavoidable. To die, is the doom of us all. We all, my brethren, shall be called to submit in our turns to that fate, which our nature so obstinately dreads. If, then, there are any considerations, which may reconcile us to this unavoidable doom, blessed is the wisdom which suggests them; happy is the prudence which engraves them on the tablet of the heart! They will break the most gloomy bondage of man. They will correct the most bitter ingredient in the cup of his allotments.

To the evils to be encountered in passing through

^a 1 Cor. xv. 58.

“ the valley of the shadow of death ^b,” Christianity furnishes many and sufficient antidotes. But, to the existence of this “ valley ” in our way, we must also be reconciled. There are considerations which, when pondered with a Christian spirit, render us resigned to the transitoriness of this present life, and enable us to say with the venerable Job, “ I would not live alway.” Some of these considerations it is the object of this discourse to bring to your notice. And happy shall I be, if, through the Divine assistance, I may suggest any thoughts to your minds, which may reconcile you to the necessity of your own dissolution, or to the deaths of those who are gone before you.

In the first place, then, let me observe, that a due respect to the Divine will would deter us from wishing to “ live alway.” “ It is appointed unto men once to die ^c :” and this appointment is made by the wise and benignant Father of the universe. Our life is not made transient by any malignant power. It is the same good Being who hath brought us into existence, and leads us through the different stages of life, that conducts us into “ the valley of the shadow of death ^d .” Our dissolution is a part of that economy, by which He accomplishes His purposes with the human race.

Now, why should we turn with regret from any allotment, to which it is the will of God we should submit? Do we deem it unhappy, that to the light and activity of day the darkness and sleepiness of night succeeds? Do we complain that the year, which has been enlivened with the several charms of spring, summer, and autumn, is terminated with the dreariness of winter? No. Our confidence in the wisdom of the Supreme Being teaches us, that

^b Ps. xxiii. 4.

^c Heb. ix. 27.

^d Ps. xxiii. 4.

night as well as day, that winter as well as summer, is necessary in its place; that the vicissitudes which He hath ordained to the hours, and the months, are productive of the greatest natural benefits. Why, then, should we repine at the vicissitudes which He hath appointed to the generation of men? The same wisdom, which at the close of the day requires us to lose ourselves in the sleep of night, calls us at the close of life to rest in the grave. The same God who giveth the earth in the end of the year, to be bound with the fetters of winter, leaves life, when its spring, its summer, and its autumn have elapsed, to be bound awhile in the insensibility of death. The purposes of God, which are dearer to every good man than any thing else, are as much carried on by our dissolution, as by our birth, or by our progress through any other stages of our being. The tomb as well as the cradle, we may safely presume, is meet for the display of His power. Death, were it not subservient to His glory, and fit and necessary for the creatures who are made subject to it, would not have place in any part of the dominions of God. That I must die, may in itself be an awful consideration. But that I must die, considered as the appointment of the gracious Being who made me, claims my cheerful acquiescence. For whatever may be the views of the Almighty with regard to mankind (and I have evidences enough that they are views of benignity and love) the methods by which He pursues them, I may feel assured, are the fittest and most proper which could have been chosen, and are parts of the scheme by which He is accomplishing the happiness of His saints, and the greatest possible good of the universe.

There is, indeed, in a submission to the laws, to which the all-wise Creator hath subjected our nature, both safety and virtue. No man, who considers the

wisdom from which they have their origin, and the ends to which they are directed, would wish an exemption from them. It is enough to reconcile us to our mortality, that it is the will of God. That obligation to duty which is upon a child; that obligation to obedience which is upon a subject; that obligation to submission which is upon a creature; that claim to confidence which wisdom, like the Deity's, may assert; that title to unqualified reliance which goodness, like our Maker's, possesses, all conspire, when God hath limited our present life, to restrain us from wishing to "live always." Is death punitive? It is not more than we have deserved. Is it, as we are taught, sent in mercy? Let us not dare to dispute its expediency. Whether it proceed from justice, or from mercy, or from both, the good man knows that it is his duty, and also his safety, to be entirely at the disposal of the Almighty. It may be, that through an instinctive affection for being, he may, in the hour of infirmity, shrink from what has the appearance of a destruction of existence, and be ready to exclaim, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But when he considers the preference which the Divine will ought to have to his own wishes, that that must be fittest and best, which the Almighty hath ordained, reason and religion will unite in correcting his wish, and the last expression of his lips will be, "Not my will, but Thine, be done."

Again. We may be reconciled to the necessity of dying, by considering who have passed through the gate of death. "Abraham is dead, and the prophets!" The apostles are dead, and the good men of every age! Surely, it is not a fate so much to be deprecated, to which these favourites of heaven

† Matt. xxvi. 39.

‡ Luke xxii. 42.

• John viii. 52.

have submitted ! Surely, we need not be shocked at entering the path, which these worthies have trodden ! It is no inconsiderable boon, that death will dissipate the centuries that intervene, and make us companions of those, who have been the friends of God, and the bright models of faith and virtue to mankind. Our kindred also are dead ; our fathers, it may be, and our dear mothers ; and the friends whom we have loved as our own souls. In a world which they have left for ever, who would always remain ? To the state, to which they have passed, who does not sometimes solace himself with the expectation of one day going ? Death gathers us to our fathers. Death restores to us the friends of whom he had deprived us. Death brings the child to the long absent parent, he brings the parent to her oft lamented child. Pleasant to nature is the thought even of mingling our ashes with the ashes of our ancestors, and sharing with our kindred the repose of the grave. But ravishing to the eye of faith is the prospect of rejoining their spirits in better worlds, and winging with them the flights of immortality. Jesus too, our blessed Redeemer, He hath passed through the gate of death. And shall we not choose to drink of the cup of which He drank ? The vale which He hath consecrated by His own presence, shall we be averse to enter ? There is a noble satisfaction in sharing the fate of the worthy. There is a comfort, a joy, in being conformed in our fortunes to those, whom we venerate or love. How much, then, in the contemplation of dissolution, must it bend the Christian's mind to his doom, to recollect that his Lord submitted to die !

I know not, whether there is not a generous sentiment in human nature, which amidst the universal mortality of mankind, would deter a noble mind from being willing to " live always," the solitary

survivor of the desolation of his species. But this I know, that if we are faithful, death introduces us to better company than that from which he takes us: and that those whom we leave here will presently follow, to be added, if they are worthy, to the same society. It is by death, that we are most eminently brought to an “innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and Church of the first-born,—and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator^b.” Who, then, would remain always upon the earth, to be separated by the partition of the flesh from his former contemporaries and the righteous of every age, and to be looked upon, perhaps, by the beings of later years, as a stranger and an intruder? Better it is to share in our turns of the common allotment of our race. Better it is, when we have served our own generation, according to the will of God, to fall asleep.

I add thirdly, that the condition of this present state is such, that no Christian can wish to live in it always. Not that it becomes us to find fault with the circumstances of our present existence. For what it is, a journey, a pilgrimage, a transient abode, God has furnished it with accommodations suitable and pleasant, which ought to be noticed by us with cheerfulness, and used with thankfulness. But it is a happiness, that we have not here our everlasting abode; that this is not our rest. For to the best men, it is a state of temptation, and difficult warfare. It is covered with snares; it is filled with devious paths; and we are in it frail to resist, and inclined to wander. With the most earnest desire to walk with God, the good man finds himself, many times falling. He aspires with all the ardour of faith after spiritual excellence; but, alas, he feels himself weighed down by this body of sin.

^b Heb. xii. 22—24.

It is problematical, whether our virtue or our trials would prevail, if our probation were prolonged; but discretion would seem to plead for the shortest exposure to evil. The present is also to the wisest of men, a state of uneasy ignorance. Confined is our knowledge. Fettered are the noble faculties of our souls. Of God, and the unbounded works of God; of being, and the infinite modifications of being; of truth, and the glorious beauties, the innumerable applications of truth, we can here possess but a very imperfect knowledge. And in all probability, a prolongation of our earthly residence would not render us proportionably wiser. Successions of great minds have taken up the thread of investigation, each where his predecessor left it; and yet, how little way in the course of ages has one been able to carry it beyond another. In these tabernacles of flesh, we can “know but in partⁱ.” From the most exalted pleasures of intelligent beings, from the expansion and gratification of the noblest faculties of our nature, we are in a great measure restrained in our present state. It is evidently an infancy, in which we can acquire but the rudiments of knowledge. There are glorious heights, there are unbounded extents of wisdom and of wonders; but, while we are confined to earth, and encumbered with flesh, we cannot attain unto them. This life is also, to the happiest and to all men, a state of vexation and sorrow. Ah! where shall I look, to see human nature unaccompanied by woe? the cries of infancy, the disappointments of youth, the tribulations of manhood, the tears of old age, all proclaim that in this world we are “born unto trouble^k.” No man finds in it the satisfaction he promises himself. Every man may be seen in some part or other of

ⁱ 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

^k Job v. 7.

his path, musing in sadness over the burden of his sorrows; perhaps saying to his soul, if not to those who pass by, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit¹." It is only in the grave that our cares, disappointments and troubles will be terminated. There, though the ocean of life be thrown into tempests, the peaceful slumberers hear not the roar of its waves. There, when the sky of the living is overcast with blackness, the happy dead see not the terrors of the clouds. There sleeps in peace the venerable father, whom the profligacy of his sons has pierced through with many sorrows. And there the fond mother ceases at last to "weep for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were not^m." There, too, the mind of the patriot is no more perplexed for the fate of his country; and there the heart of the priest no longer trembles for the ark of God. "There," says Job, "the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his masterⁿ."

Let it, then, be remembered of death, that it releases us from the temptations, ignorance, and sorrows of this probationary existence: sorrows and temptations, to which we may resign ourselves, when we can consider them as incidents of a journey to a better life; but which, if we were doomed to "live alway" among them, might dishearten our virtue, and break our spirits. It was principally with a view to the sufferings, and unsatisfactoriness of life, that the good patriarch exclaimed, "I would not live alway." And it was, probably, with a foresight of the sins and the miseries to which man when he had fallen, would be exposed by a perpetual

¹ Eccles. i. 14.

^m Jer. xxxi. 15.

ⁿ Job iii. 17—19

continuance in the flesh, that his merciful Creator forbade him access to the tree of life, and shortened his days. It is true, in this present world we may look to the Cross, and be healed of the wounds which sin inflicts; we are fed in the ordinances of the Gospel with manna from heaven; and in the influences of the Spirit there floweth water from the unfailing rock, wherewith we may be refreshed. But it is, nevertheless, a wilderness state. We are beset in it with dangers, and incumbered with cares. The Canaan of our rest, the land of peace and prosperity, which our God hath promised us, is not on this side of the grave. Till we have passed the stream which separates us from heaven, we are wanderers at best; we sojourn amidst difficulties and sorrows; and the progress from one stage of our journeyings to another changes our stations, without diminishing our disappointments, or our cares.

And here I am brought to observe in the fourth place, that a just consideration of the future life will reconcile us entirely to the transitoriness of this. If to die were to cease to be, we might with a desperate tenacity cling to this present existence, chequered and unsatisfactory as it is. But our citizenship is in heaven. "Our life," all that is worthy to be called our life, "is hid with Christ in God^o." We have, beyond the regions of death, an inheritance of immortality. Here we are probationers, labourers, soldiers; there we enter upon the fruition of our reward. Here we are in the porch; there we are admitted into the temple of the Almighty. Here humiliation and mortality are our portion; there is laid up for us a crown of life. Here "we see through a glass, darkly^p:" there we shall see wisdom, and justice, and mercy, and all the fair offspring of

^o Col. iii. 3.

^p 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

the Deity, "face to face." Here in the blessed Jesus, though we see Him not, we anxiously believe; there He will take us to a participation of His glory, and we shall "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth⁹." Here we hear of redemption from sin, and ignorance, and death; there it shall be fully enjoyed. Here we are separated from the vision of our best Benefactor, Him whom it is the fullest expression of happiness to behold; there we shall see God. Who, then, in this region of darkness and infirmity would "live alway?" When we fasten the eye of our faith upon that state of knowledge, purity, and unsullied happiness, which is reserved in heaven for the faithful, can we wonder a moment at St. Paul's declaration, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ?" Where is the Christian, who has "done justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with his God," that may not adopt the language of the Apostle; "To me to die is gain?" Surely, our aversion from dissolution will be subdued; yea, we shall rejoice in the transitoriness of this imperfect state, when we appreciate the superior felicities, and transcendent glories of that heavenly existence, to which, through the grace of our Redeemer, death shall introduce us.

For let me remark in the last place, that by His death the "Captain of our salvation" hath overcome death, and made the passage through the grave the ordinary entrance to the reward of our inheritance. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die¹." The seed must perish in the earth, before the beauties and the glories of the plant will appear. In like manner, our bodies must decay in the grave, before we shall be clothed with immortality. Of his sceptre Jesus hath deprived death; the nature of

⁹ Rev. xiv. 4.

¹ Phil. i. 23.

¹ Mic. vi. 8.

¹ Phil. i. 21.

¹ Heb. ii. 10.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 36.

the king of terrors He hath changed; it is through his domain, gloomy indeed once, but now enlightened with the light of life, that He opened the passage to His heavenly kingdom. Of this passage Jordan was typical to God's ancient people; and it is typical to us. Its waves to the eye of nature, may appear terrible. But the "ark of the Covenant" passes before us, and the waters are rolled back on the right hand and on the left. On the opposite shore, we shall not regret the wilderness we have left, but our souls will be filled with "songs of deliverance".

You see then, my Christian friends, that the transitoriness of the present life is proper and eligible, because it is the will of God: that in dying, we submit to the fate, to which the greatest and best have submitted, and go to our fathers, our kindred, and the righteous of every age, in the same way which they and which Jesus our Master hath trodden: that the state which we leave, though good and suitable as a state of probation and pilgrimage, is yet a state of temptation, ignorance, and sorrow: that the life beyond the grave is nobler and better, exalting us to immortality, to perfect knowledge, holiness, and happiness, to enlarged acquaintance with God, and full enjoyment of Christ: and that the monarch of the intervening grave is dismantled of his terrors by that power of the Lord Jesus, which hath overcome death, and "is able to subdue all things unto Himself". What a body of motives is here to induce you, when your Creator shall call you out of this life, to depart willingly! Lay them up in your memories. The hour is coming, when each one of you will need them. Bless God, that He hath called you to the knowledge of truths, which may support you under every contemplation of that

¹ Josh. iv. 7.

² Ps. xxxii. 8.

³ Phil. iii. 21.

mortality, of which you carry the consciousness about you, and which is so often brought to your remembrance by the deaths of one and another of your friends.

And these same considerations are of powerful efficacy, to render us resigned to the departure of those who are called before us. It is tranquillizing to know, that they have died by the will of God. It is soothing to consider, that they are joined to their ancestors, and the spirits of the just. When we consider the dangers and miseries of the state from which they are taken, we shall be restrained from wishing them back. It will much cheer us, under the sense of our own bereavement, to consider that they are gone to the bosom of their God. There is holy submission inculcated by the conforming truth, that “He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken their mortal bodies^b.” With these thoughts, then, let the relations and the friends of departed excellence derive consolation, and learn submission. Let it be the chief concern of surviving friends, to have their affliction sanctified to their souls. And let us all, my hearers, when we see the aged and the young, and people of every age, passing in constant succession out of the world, be induced to set our own houses in order, and to remember, that we too must die. Let us live the life of faith and obedience; having respect in all our ways to the revealed will of our God; that when our summonses shall arrive, the considerations which will reconcile the good man to dissolution, may be ours; and we may be able to say, ‘Lord, here am I, do with me as seemeth unto Thee good^c.’

^b Rom. viii. 11.

^c 2 Sam. xv. 26.

SERMON LXXVI.

ON DEATH.

ISAIAH, LXIV. 6.

We all do fade as a leaf.

THIS metaphor of the Prophet's, is one of the most beautiful which can be found in the sacred volume. How strikingly does it describe the perishableness of man. In the spring of his being he shoots forth tenderly, and gradually expands his beauty and vigour to the view. In different individuals his form and beauties are varied, according to the will of the Divine Creator. He continues awhile, sometimes quiet in the sun-beams, and sometimes shaken by the winds. But soon he begins to change. Some blight, or worm, or time's corroding influences impair his beauty and life. He withers, dies, and falls into the dust. "We all do fade as a leaf."

The metaphor of the Prophet marks the certainty of every one's death. Every leaf, whatever its form, or properties, or beauty, must eventually decay. None is exempt. Even the evergreen, which stands through all the seasons of the year, has its period at which it must fail, and resign its place to a succeeding generation. "It is appointed unto" all "men

once to die ^a." And one after another, whole generations of men appear and vanish, like the transient foliage of succeeding years.

This beautiful metaphor also reminds us of the uncertainty of the time of any individual's death. Leaves fade of every age. And which of them is our peculiar emblem, we are unable to ascertain. Some stand through winter, verdant amidst the snows and frosts of ages. Some are fitted by nature to enjoy and adorn a short summer. Some the concealed moth secretly and unseasonably consumes. And some are nipped from the stock as soon as they appear. We are unable to say which of these fates shall be our own. Few, very few, however, are the leaves which survive the autumn of the year. It is much more probable that we shall be cut down in the midsummer, yea, or in the very spring of life, than that we shall reach the winter of old age. And if we should stand through all the seasons, how soon is the whole year gone!

But this instructive metaphor suggests to us the renovation which shall follow our decay. Nothing perishes in the material world. There is, indeed, a death of vegetative nature. But it is only for a season. Every thing fades to be renewed. The leaves which are fallen shall in the spring be all replaced. The Almighty "turneth" them "to destruction; again He saith, Come again"^b ye offspring of My power; when, lo, the tree which seemed desolate, is re-animated; and from the earth, with which its faded leaves were mingled, there arises a new covering for it of transcendent freshness and beauty. Thus in the material world, decay is invariably succeeded by life. The grain dies in the earth, and is quickened. The sun which

^a Heb. ix. 27.

^b Ps. xc. 5.

sets, rises. The leaves which fall, are restored in wonderful order, and each in its own peculiar form and properties. And who, that contemplates these things, and observes the power and economy of God in the natural world, can doubt His ability or willingness to preserve, in the moral and spiritual world, the nobler beings to whom He has given existence? Who, that beholds all men fading as a leaf, and reflects upon their superior endowments, can avoid embracing the hope, that there shall be for them a glorious spring, in which the Almighty Father shall say, "Come again, ye children of men?" Blessed be His name, "that He hath begotten us" to an assurance of this "lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The Gospel confirms and enlarges the virtuous expectations of nature. By its light we see a beautiful analogy in all the operations of the Most High. The doctrine of our immortality converts every plant into a preacher. Even the affecting remark of the Prophet, that "we all do fade as a leaf," reminds us that we shall be renewed: and, (distinguished lot!) renewed in a resemblance to the tree of life, whose leaves neither change nor fall, but flourish for ever in immortal beauty, by the river of the city of God.

Having thus developed the truths, which the Prophet has so beautifully wrapped in the text, let us ask ourselves, what influence they should have upon our lives?

And, in the first place, do "we all fade as a leaf?" What a foundation is this for humility. We are prone to be proud of our wisdom, our beauty, our accomplishments, our strength, and our wealth: and to nourish, enjoy, and display these, constitutes

^c Ps. xc. 5.

^d 1 Pet. i. 5.

a great part of the business of mankind. But what a satire upon all this, is the text! How should it check all the pride of life to know, that it must end in the abasement of the grave! Come ye beautiful and young, ye wise, and accomplished, descend into the chambers where sleep the dead. Open that coffin. Lovely in death is the beautiful ruin it contains. But ah! on that pale cheek was once the rose's hue! That eye once sparkled with the diamond's lustre. Those limbs were once the seats of elegance and dignity. Alas, how changed! Faded as the fallen leaf; and hastening to be converted into dust! Are you proud of your personal accomplishments? Have the honours and charms of this life captivated your heart? Remember that to this state you must presently come.

Again. Do mankind fall like the leaves of every age, and can no one ascertain the time of his death? Let us not presume upon our lives. Let us not flatter ourselves that the day of our dissolution is far distant. It is blinding ourselves on the edge of a precipice. It is refusing to listen to the voice of experience and of Providence, while we yield ourselves to the delusion of our hearts. For what ground have we, on which to think our lives are safe, which they had not, who are now no longer among the living? Are we young? So were they. Are we healthy? So were they. Are we useful in the world, and necessary to our families? So were they. Are we enlisted under the banner of faith, and fortified with the armour of virtue? So were they. Yet in the midst of life they are cut down. Their hopes and expectations in this world are perished. They are snatched from the scenes, which they seemed destined to beautify for many years to come, before they had expanded half their charms. We are of the same substance with them. To the arrows which

pierced them, we are ever exposed. And while we are busy in life, and letting our hearts cheer us with many joys, the fatal shaft may be winging its way towards us, which shall lay us in the grave. What a motive is this to diligence and watchfulness! If we have yet an interest in our Redeemer's kingdom to secure, what an inducement does the uncertainty of life furnish, to do it "while it is called to-day." The realities of eternity at stake, and the probation in which they may be secured, liable to be terminated with the passing hour! "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest^f."

Once more. Are we destined, like the face of nature, to be renovating after our decay? Let us not be dismayed by our own mortality, nor by that of our friends. The knowledge of a resurrection is sufficient to reconcile us to all the painful concomitants of death. When our virtuous friends decay, the idea that their spirits have ascended to the care and enjoyment of their God, should alleviate the sting of our bereavement. And in the anticipation of our own dissolution, the spirits of Christians should be supported by the prospect of the glory reserved with Christ, and the assurance that He "will never leave them, nor forsake them^g." Our chief concern is, while we are passing through this mutable state, to lead a life of faith and obedience; that in the last day we may not be gathered for the burning, but be found among "the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord^h," which He will glorify.

These are the truths suggested to our hearts by the affecting declaration, that "we all do fade as a leaf." Ever and anon, is the providence of God en-

^e Heb. iii. 13.

^f Eccles. ix. 10.

^g Heb. xiii. 5.

^h Is. lxi. 3.

forcing His Prophet's observation. And the continual removal of acquaintance or friends in the morning or meridian of their days, teaches us all the precariousness of the life upon which we are prone to lavish our fondest expectations. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for everⁱ:" "and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you^k."

ⁱ Is. xl. 6, 8.

^k 1 Pet. i. 25.

SERMON LXXVII.

—
ON DEATH.
—

ISAIAH, xl. 6—8.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

INTERESTING and affecting passage! We feel, blessed Spirit of the Highest, the truth of Thy description! We thank Thee for the consolation, with which Thou hast kindly softened the shade, in this too just picture of human fragility! Your hearts, my brethren, are attuned to the contemplation of this subject: and it will be my endeavour in discoursing from it, to set before you the vanity and transitoriness of the present life; and the joy to be derived, amidst its changes and decay, from the purport and certainty of “the word of our God.”

It is a humiliating lesson we have first to consider. The love of ourselves is so strong; we with so much pride and ardour exult in the possession of being; our earthly projects are formed and pursued with such high expectations; and we behold with so much complacence the attainments of the wise, the

amiable, and the accomplished: that our spirits faint within us, we are humbled to the dust, when compelled to realize, that man in all the glories of his best estate is but a transient being; that as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

The lesson is painful, as well as humiliating. There are objects and pleasures, which with magnetic force hold us to earth. The actual possession of the present existence makes us anxious to prolong it. We form attachments, which are unavoidable; and the severing of these is the cutting of the heart-strings. The endearments of our condition, the esteem of our fellow men, the acquisition of the means of happiness or of usefulness, all bind us to life, and to our friends: they delight us with our being, and make us solicitous for its prolongation. Under these circumstances, the voice is chilling which proclaims in our ears, "All flesh is grass." It comes like a blast over the feelings and affections of nature. It is not till age or disease has exhausted the strength to live, and rendered "the grasshopper a burden^a;" or till the world has lost its charms, and hope withdrawn her bow from its clouds; that any, but those who seem almost to have heaven in hand, can hear without reluctance, that death is waiting his opportunity to tear them from all that is dear, and lay them in the dust.

Hence it is, that men fly from the contemplation of their mortality. There is nothing on which their attention is with so much difficulty fixed. They wish the hostile day, which shall dismantle them of all their goodliness, for ever distant; and what they wish, almost believe. Riveted to present objects, deluded by the flattering aspect life assumes, proud of their acquisitions and powers, and entranced in

^a Eccles. xii. 5.

their joys, they care not to admit the mournful, mortifying consideration, that the scene in which they are busy, is a fleeting scene, its actors perishable, and all its charms and glories “a vain shew^b.”

Yet, there is no lesson we are more frequently called to learn; none which the providence of God more impressively inculcates; which experience teaches with such pathos, and solemn repetition. What is the funeral scene to which we are daily summoned? What are the insignia of the places in all ages hallowed to receive the dead? What the result of every sober review of the years we have past? What, in a word, are the annals of our race, but elucidations, affecting elucidations of the Prophet's metaphor? Men have ‘come up as flowers, and been cut down; and never have continued in one stay^c.’ Some in the bud have been nipped, and never opened their properties to the light. Others have expanded their graceful forms, and begun to give their goodly fragrance to the world; but before noon have shed their leaves, and died. Others have survived the day, but have decayed more rapidly than they matured, and, shorn of their beauty, have presently perished. Some few stand through the season; but much do they fade, and suddenly vanish. The wind passeth over them, and they are gone; and “the place” which once knew them “knoweth them no more^d.” All in their turns return to their dust. The lowly, on whose plainness no eye bestows an observing look; and the lofty, on whose goodliness expectation fastens its fondest notice, alike expand to perish. In no age, in no condition, may we feel ourselves secure from this inevitable decay. Do we trust in our youth, or strength, and rejoice that the current yet moves sprightly in our

^b Ps. xxxix. 6.

^c Job xiv. 2.

^d Ps. ciii. 16.

veins? See here, while age stands by and survives, the young and the promising cut down, put into darkness at the bright mid-day of life. Do we fortify ourselves with our wisdom, or skill, or rely on our usefulness among men? See there the lamps of knowledge, which illumined the world, put out; the skill, which could check disease in others, unable to preserve itself: and important characters taken from the world, when it should seem, they can least be spared. The destroying tyrant is never at rest. All are exposed to his shafts. His victims are often taken from the safest paths; and the young and useful do most frequently magnify his triumphs.

Not that we are to think, chance rules the destinies of men. He only can extinguish life, who kindled it. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.” Both reason and Scripture refer us to the Deity as determining the boundaries of every man’s life. “He taketh away their breath, and they die*.” “He changeth their countenance, and sendeth them away†.” “He destroyeth the hope of man‡.”

It may well surprise us to find death in His creation. Nothing can account for its dominion over the fairest of His works, but the unfortunate transgression of the parents of our race. Experience confirms the melancholy tale, which the Scriptures narrate. Nature has found herself incumbered with a debt; all ages have been subject to woes and deaths; which, unless we renounce all belief in an active Sovereign, must be considered as tokens of displeasure. Every man carries in himself the evidence of a fallen state; for though formed with capacities for eternal progression in virtue and happiness, and endued by his Maker with an unconquerable love of

* Ps. civ. 29.

† Job xiv. 20.

‡ Ibid. ver. 19.

being, he has within him the punitory sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return^b."

Is all, then, fleeting that concerns man? Must the bright charms of life be all dissolved? While the soul fancies itself possessed of substantial being, and aspires to a relation with eternity, is it connected only with the passing moment, and nothing permanent but mutability? If it were so, our hearts might sicken at a life so vain. Appalled at death's dominion over the works of God, we might be urged to ask with the Psalmist, in his anguish, "Wherefore hast Thou made all for men noughtⁱ?" The stupendous scenes and events, with which we are conversant, would seem like vast arrangements for no purpose; like mighty efforts for no end. But this is not, cannot be the case. We are recalled from the declaration of the perishableness of man, to the certainty of the designs and promises of God. "The word of our God shall stand for ever."

What this word is, may be easily ascertained. At the mention of it the Prophet is transported from his mournful theme, to the times and achievements of the Messiah. From the rapture with which he immediately hails the glad tidings of Zion: from the explicitness with which he speaks of the coming of the Lord, and passes to the contemplation of Him in the tender acts of His office; and from the termination of his fervent strain in the assurance, that they who wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength, and mount up with wings as eagles; it is evident, he had in view the eternal purpose of God in the revelation of His Son. Indeed, an inspired Apostle, having quoted the passage which leads our thoughts, has remarked on its concluding clause,

^b Gen. iii. 19.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 46.

“ This is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you^k. ”

Now the grand purport of the Gospel is, to exhibit death subdued, and open to man the prospect of eternal life and glory. It proclaims to us the gracious determination of the Most High, to recover His fallen creatures from that death, to which they have become subject: and by the counsels of His infinite wisdom, and efforts of His Almighty power, to raise them from glory to glory, to a full and perpetual enjoyment of His presence and heavenly kingdom. Do we ask, how the amazing design is to be accomplished? His Son is revealed coming from the bosom of the Father, in the greatness of His strength, to arrest the monarch of the tomb, and break his sceptre; to burst the prisons which contain his victims, and strike off the fetters with which they are bound; and to unbar before them the portals of everlasting glory. Do we ask, how we, who are passing to corruption, can be capacitated for the benefits of the great behest? “ Behold, He shows us a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed^l. ” The way is pointed out by His infallible wisdom, and the means are furnished from His exhaustless treasure; and all, who will avail themselves of the glorious salvation by complying with its conditions, have the joyful assurance, that when “ the earthly house of this their tabernacle is dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens^m. ”

^k 1 Pet. i. 25.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

^m 2 Cor. v. 1.

This is the infinite purpose of God, as revealed in His word,—to free His offspring from the dominion of death: that He may restore to them their resemblance to the Divine likeness, and exalt them to everlasting life. To this gracious design, time from the commencement of his flight, and the great movements of the Divine government, have had constant reference. In its accomplishment, this visible scene with all its events and obscurities shall issue, and the intentions of the Almighty towards this part of His universe have their august completion. Immutable in His purposes, and “able” by His infinite power, “to subdue all things unto Himself,” though men decay in sad succession, and no trace remains visible of the life that has fled; though all nature seems subject to the ruthless havoc of time; yea, though the earth should dissolve, and the heavens with their host pass away:—His counsel shall stand, and He will accomplish his pleasure; His “word shall not pass away.”

Here, then, is a permanent point; a rock of refuge from the dismal mutability of every thing about us. This system of change, this scene of mortality, is conducted by the unerring hand of the Most High. Out of it shall spring the accomplishment of unfathomable designs. It is His stedfast purpose to bring the children whom He has chosen, to ineffable bliss and glory in His kingdom; “and though after their skin worms destroy these bodies, yet in their flesh shall they see God^o.”

In this view of the transitoriness of our present condition, our minds are tranquillized. Were we compelled to believe, that this short, delusive being is our all; that we must be stripped for ever of life,

^a Phil. iii 21.

^o Job xix. 26.

of knowledge, of virtue, of all we hold dear; and in the corruption of the grave have the end of our existence; we well might fly from the thought of our fate. It were sufficient to cast a gloom over every hour of our lives. But have we “a Captain of salvation^p,” appointed by the Highest? Is He “the resurrection and the life^q?” And shall those, who believe in Him, be brought through the vale of darkness into the presence of His Father, and participation of His glory? Then may we consider without being overwhelmed with the thought, that God will bring us to death, and to “the house appointed for all living^r.”

But it is in the dissolution of our friends, that we feel most sensibly the vanity of life. When these dear objects of our fond affections are taken away, we are more deeply distressed by the perishableness of man, even than when we contemplate our own mortality. And if death were their utter extinction, their decay would, indeed, be insupportable. For who could bear to think, that their hope, their love, and all their goodly powers, were annihilated; and they for ever struck out from the works and care of God? Who could sustain the reflection, that they are bound with everlasting fetters; and shall slumber, senseless, in their dark, mouldering beds, through the long, long, endless duration of eternity? If ages shall revolve on them without their waking; if being shall continue for ever without their having any interest in it, alas that we have known the objects, who have bound our affections to their fate! But! blessed be God, we are not left to these disheartening opinions. They are redeemed

^p Heb. ii. 10.

^q John xi. 25.

^r Job xxx. 22.

by Him from death. Out of decay they shall rise in a more glorious existence. His word "shall stand for ever;" and it has declared, that they, who have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb^s," are passed from death unto life; and shall die no more. This is the description He has given us of their condition, "They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes^t." Invaluable corrective of life's bitterest sorrow! With this antidote to the perishableness of man, we can support ourselves under the departure of our Christian friends. Affection is consoled by clinging to the idea of their eternal being; and hope brings a precious beam of comfort into the bereaved bosom, in the sentiment of presently rejoining them in their exalted state.

Indeed in the extensive field in which the Gospel places us, the transient events of time, the perishable life with which we here delight us, nay, this little earth on which we make a momentary stay, are inconsiderable objects. How do we rise above the transitoriness of the present scene, how do its hopes and prospects, its joys and pursuits, sink in our estimation, when we consider eternity as our sphere, God as our portion, and heaven as our rest! When we reflect on our real condition and expectations; when we behold in the achievements of

^t Rev. vii. 14.

^s Ibid. ver. 15—17.

the Redeemer the point of death's spear blunted; and the cloud which rendered mortality terrible, removed; when, through the promises of the un-failing word, the glories of our future destination burst upon our view, pure, blissful, immortal: does not the dissolution of this temporal life seem but an incident to the mighty whole? Are we not ready with the Apostle to exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

From the contemplation of this subject we learn, my hearers, with how little wisdom we rely on the hopes, pursuits, and expectations of this vain world; and how much it behoves us to attend to the permanent concerns, which we have in the Gospel. Is this life fleeting as the breeze? Are all its charms and glories, like the evening brilliance, transient, and followed by darkness? Must we all fade like the grass, and, divested of every temporal acquirement, lie down in the dust? Then let us cease to use this state, as if it were eternal, and its perishable joys sufficient to satisfy our desires. But shall "this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality^x?" Amidst the uncertainties of life, and rapid decays of the generations of men, is there a stedfast purpose of Jehovah to bring "many sons unto glory^y?" By this let us hold, and govern ourselves by the obligations it imposes. Reflecting nature looks for something permanent. His word, like a rock unmoved by the storms and fluctuations of life's ocean, offers itself to our spirits, fluttering over the perilous scene: and on it we may rest, and feel ourselves safe, till His Almighty arm comes to our deliverance.

Finally. As rational beings, capable of improving

^u 1 Cor. xv. 55.

^x Ibid. ver. 53.

^y Heb. ii. 10.

the events which pass before us, it becomes us, my brethren, to consider the end of "all flesh;" and seriously to lay it to heart. To the young, the sprightly, the busy votaries of the world I would call, and urge them to awake from their dreams of vanity, to a knowledge of the insufficiency of that happiness, which is passing away. The objects you pursue, the thoughts on which you rely, are lighter than vanity, and unworthy of your powers, compared with the views to which you may attain. Trust me, my friends, you have immortal spirits, which death does not affect. Lay hold of the means of bringing them to a glory and felicity which surpass your conception, that an all-gracious God has furnished in the Gospel. Live by its laws. Weigh soberly its claims to your reverence. And through the merits of its Author, seek in the discharge of every religious and moral duty, "for glory and honour and immortality^z." Then, on the confines of the untried scene, to which time is imperceptibly bearing you, you shall feel the peace and joy, which the world can neither give nor take away: and with infinite satisfaction you shall, hereafter, felicitate yourselves on the course you pursued, when the Saviour of the world, who is now on the right hand of the Father, shall descend, not crowned with thorns, nor to bear the humiliations of the cross, but to administer the everlasting justice of the Almighty, and gather His redeemed into unspeakable joy. Let none of us delay to have our interest in the heavenly world made sure. The moments fly, which are carrying us to the tomb. Soon shall "the silver cord be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken;" soon shall "the keepers of the house

^z Rom. ii. 7.

tremble,—and all the daughters of music be brought low^a.” Perhaps the hour is now receiving its commission, at the approach of which the looks of our friends, and the voice of our physician shall tell us, we must die. Happy for us, if on the rapid and eventful tide which is wafting us from the present scene, we act as prudence and wisdom dictate. Yea, inexpressibly happy, if we so conduct ourselves, as neither to be deluded by the life which now is; nor debarred from the eternal glory and happiness of that, which is to come !

^a Eccles. xii. 6, 3, 4.

SERMON LXXVIII.

ON THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.

2 SAMUEL, xii. 22, 23.

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

WE have in this chapter, one of the most beautiful and affecting narratives, which the sacred volume contains. A parent, even David, the good king of Israel, is introduced, fasting and weeping, and beseeching God for his child, grievously sick. Oppressed with unutterable woe, the distressed father lies all night upon the earth, and is unable to eat bread. His fears are realized; the child dies. Filled with compassion for their royal master, “the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead^a?” But their sadness and stillness spoke more than words, to the anticipating eye of parental anxiety. “David perceived that the child was dead^b.” What now is his conduct?

^a 2 Sam. xii. 18.

^b Ibid. ver. 19.

“ He arises from the earth, and washes, and anoints himself, and changes his apparel, and comes into the house of the Lord, and worships^c :” returned to his own house, he takes the sustenance which nature requires, and exhibits a fine model of resignation to his wondering family, in the memorable words of my text, “ While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept : for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live ? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast ? can I bring him back again ? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

I will not detain you to enlarge upon the fact, that it was the hand of the Lord which struck David’s child with the sickness, that terminated in death. Whoever believes in His providence, and is acquainted with His word, must know that all diseases act by His permission, and are under his control. It would be utterly irreconcilable with the truth of His being and government, to suppose that the lives of any of His creatures are given a prey to chance, and that He beholds their destruction, uninterested and unmoved. A sparrow falls not to the ground, without His notice ; and, surely, His intelligent children are “ of more value than many sparrows^d.”

Nor need I stay long to illustrate the propriety of David’s conduct, in betaking himself to God, in behalf of his child, while it yet lingered on this side of the grave. It is obvious to the least reflection, that to continue life, as well as to give it, is the prerogative of the Almighty. Prayer, therefore, should be made to him, whenever, in our own case, or in the case of others for whom we are concerned, we need the intervention of His omnipotent hand. Right it is, ‘ and our bounden duty,’ that whenever

^c 2 Sam. xii. 20.

^d Matt. x. 31.

sickness endangers life, we should have recourse to the skill and means with which He hath, of His abundant mercy, furnished the earth for our use. But for their efficacy, they are dependant upon His blessing. He only, to whose power all the productions of nature owe their virtues, from the “cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall^e,” can render their application effectual to the recovery of departed health. It is He, who sendeth forth the destroying angel for the accomplishment of His purposes: and He only can interrupt his progress, and say, “It is enough: stay now thine hand^f.”

Suffice it to have said thus much upon the agency of the Divine hand in allotting us sickness or health, and upon the propriety of applying to the Most High as the ablest physician in the day of disease. It may often happen that His will may be adverse to our wishes. But as the righteous do always offer their supplications with perfect submission to the Divine wisdom, this should not be an occasion of grief. On the contrary, when we have been faithful in our prayers, and faithful in the use of such means as skill and prudence have directed, we should acquiesce in the issue, whatever it may be.

Which leads me to fix your attention upon the beautiful picture of reasonable and holy resignation, which the closing scene in the sacred narrative offers to your contemplation. Here are two things worthy of our particular consideration, the reasons of David's resignation, and the manner in which it manifested itself.

We will first advert to the grounds of his resignation: “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” The good

^e 1 Kings iv. 35.

^f 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

Psalmist had done, as every pious parent will do in similar circumstances: he had bowed himself before the Most High God, and besought him right humbly for his child. Death had signified it to be the Divine pleasure, that the child should be taken to another state of existence. To resist, would be vain; to repine would be fruitless. Our grief may unman ourselves, it may distress our friends, it may unfit us for the discharge of the duties of life, it may offend our God: but it can never call back from the tomb the beloved objects upon whom death hath once fixed his unrelenting hand. They hear not our sighs; they regard not our tears. Though rivers of waters should run down our cheeks, though we should give up all the pleasures and pursuits of life, and devote our days and nights to mourning; it would be of no avail. The spirit once fled returns no more. We "cannot bring it back again." It is the appointment of that Being, who will not condescend to dispute with us His right to the creatures of His hand. His will must be done. Reason, therefore, on this ground combined her voice with religion's, in inducing the Psalmist to endure with manly submission, what he was unable to amend.

It is true, it would be a melancholy fortitude which these reflections produce, if it were not strengthened and cheered by another consideration. Though fate forbad David to call back to his embrace his departed child, was he separated from him for ever? Was the spark of life which had been kindled in his babe, extinguished eternally? Was the little offspring of his body struck out of all being, born only to die, fated to a shorter and more joyless existence than the idle gossamer that floats upon the air? Verily, to the tender heart of the affectionate king, the thought had been insupportable. But he was consoled with far other expectations. The spark of being which

the Almighty had kindled in his child, was kindled to burn for ever. The Messiah had consecrated it to immortality. "I shall go to him," though "he shall not return to me."

Even in the prospect of being joined to our departed friends in the noiseless tomb, nature finds a solace, suited to the gloomy state of her feelings in the hour of her bereavement. But David had sung the happiness of walking "through the valley of the shadow of death^g," supported and comforted by God's rod and staff. He had proclaimed on his inspired harp the satisfaction which the faithful will find, when they behold God's face in righteousness, and awake up from the sleep of death, created anew after His likeness. We may therefore presume, that his views were elevated above the repose, which he should find with his child in the peaceful grave. Faith, doubtless, carried his mind forward to another state, in which the beauteous bud that is removed from this inclement world, before it is blown, expands in wonderful and unfading perfection. He thought of heaven. Hope, the inseparable companion of faith, refreshed his heart with the promise of a period, in which he should find his little one in Abraham's bosom. It was not, therefore, a cause of dejection, that he could not bring his child "back again." God's ways were perfect. It was enough, and he rejoiced that he could say, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

A resignation, grounded on such considerations as these, must have blessed and exalted the Psalmist's character. Let us briefly notice the manner in which it manifested itself. Behold, he, who careless of attire lay weeping on the earth, arises and washes himself, and changes his apparel. He, whom no

^g Ps. xxiii. 4.

consideration could draw from the place where his child lay sick, goes forth spontaneously "into the house of the Lord, and worships^h." He, whom the elders of his house had entreated in vain to receive some sustenance, himself gives orders to set on bread. He, whom his servants "feared to tell that the child was deadⁱ," leaves their astonished minds below his fortitude, and discourses with them on the reasonableness and propriety of submission. How majestic in his affliction! What greatness and peace in resignation like this! There is nothing here of the coldness of the stoic, or of the disgusting hardihood of the unbeliever. David's heart was tender. We have seen during the illness of his child, and may learn from many incidents of his life, that he felt most sensibly what only parents feel. But his acquiescence sprang from a sense of duty. It was the effort of a great mind, greatly endowed with Divine grace, and anxious in all things to honour God.

It is worthy of particular observation, that the first step of the Psalmist in the day of his sorrow, is to "the house of the Lord^k." As soon as he had attired himself in the garments of decency, he went into the temple. There, we may presume, he confessed his sins to his Maker, especially that flagrant departure from the law of God, which had been the occasion of the death of the child. There, we may suppose, he humbled himself in his prayer, and acknowledged the justice of the Almighty. There, we may believe, he sought the consolation and support of that grace, which descendeth from heaven upon the afflicted soul; as the dew upon the grass when it languisheth. His conduct, my brethren, is worthy of imitation. I know not where the children of sorrow should go, if not to the house of

^h 2 Sam. xii. 20.

ⁱ Ibid. ver. 18.

^k 2 Sam. xii. 20.

their heavenly Father. It is in the holiness of the sanctuary, that that "beauty" is found, which the Prophet was to give instead of "ashes," to those "who mourned in Zion¹." It is in the sacred vessels of the temple, that the "oil of joy" is kept, which God's people are to have "for mourning." And here, we trust, when we are assembled "in His name," Immanuel is "in the midst of us," who furnishes from the wardrobe of heaven "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Are you then bereaved, or afflicted? Fail not to seek your Maker in the house which He hath chosen "to place His name there^m." "Go into His tabernacle, and fall low on your knees before his footstoolⁿ." Humble yourselves in His sight under his heavy hand. Pour out your griefs before Him, and beseech Him to speak peace to your perturbed bosoms. Trust me, He is a refuge in distress, "a very present help"^o "in the needful time of trouble^p." David went into his sanctuary, and was strengthened. And his God is your God, powerful as a Comforter: at whose word the gloomy clouds of sorrow will vanish, and the impetuous tossings of your hearts be still.

The subject we have contemplated, though singularly appropriate to those whom Providence has bereaved of their children, is to us all both a picture and an encomium of resignation. In vain do we afflict our souls for any of the dead. We cannot "bring them back again." But we have duties to discharge, while we are continued here; and religion holds out to us the hope, that we shall find them again, when our probation is accomplished. We "shall go to them!" Blessed assurance in this region of mortality! The tender parent, whose breasts have nourished, and whose prayers have

¹ Is. lxi. 3.

^m Deut. xiv. 23.

ⁿ Ps. cxxxii. 7.

^o Ps. xlvi. 1.

^p Ps. x. 1.

blessed us, slumbers in the dust. The lovely child, whose life and qualities were just expanding to view, is cropped by an untimely blast. The friend of our bosoms, who was dear to us as our own souls, is gone, irrecoverably gone, to that ' bourn, whence no traveller returns.' We think with sadness, that they once were. We sigh with anguish, that they will be here no more. But we " shall go to them." We shall lie down in the grave together, and our ashes will be mingled with theirs. In the morning of the resurrection they will revive together. We shall appear with them before the throne of the Lamb. If we have been as little children, we shall enter with them into the kingdom of heaven, where there shall be no more sorrow, separation, nor death; " and God shall wipe away all tears " from every eye. Surely, my friends, if this were delusion, it were a delusion to be prized above all truth. But when we have it assured to us on the word of God; when we have it confirmed on the testimony of Jesus; when we see the heathen Sage, the Jewish Patriarch, and the Christian Apostle, entertaining the same hope, it ought to produce in us, under all the dispensations of the Most High, a conduct emulous of David's excellence. " While the child," the parent, or friend, " is yet alive," it is becoming to fast and weep: " for who can tell, whether God will be gracious, that they may live." But is the will of the Almighty manifested? " Wherefore should we fast?" Rather let us correct the wishes, which would oppose the providence of the Most High. " We cannot bring them back again." But it is given us by the revelation of God, to rejoice with the Psalmist in the consoling expectation, that we " shall go to them, though they shall not return to us."

SERMON LXXIX.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

PSALM, xxiii. 4.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy
staff they comfort me.*

THIS Psalm is an eminently beautiful description of the happiness, which waits upon the servants of God. Its holy author seems to have composed it in one of the happiest moments of inspiration. Contemplating the constant and tender care of the Most High over those who love Him, he breaks forth in the concise and affecting strain, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want ^a.” Filled with a lively sense of the peace, and joy, and delightful tranquillity, which the righteous find in the experience of His grace, and the contemplation of His promises, he assumes the pencil of fancy, and sketches this soft and living picture of their bliss, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; He leadeth me beside the still waters ^b.” But there was a stupendous act of Divine goodness, which his mind rose to celebrate in his song, even that dispensation, by which the world is reconciled to God, and men are enabled to

^a Ps. xxiii. 1.

^b Ibid. ver. 2.

walk acceptably before Him: "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake^c." Adverting now to His faithful mercy unto His servants of old, and reflecting upon His power, and promise to support the souls of the faithful in every emergency, until they come to the place of their rest, the enraptured Psalmist still vents the happy emotions of his bosom in the triumphant and solacing words, which I have selected for my text: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Death is what human nature is prone to dread. Most men shrink, as long as they are able, from the entrance into "the valley of the shadow" of it. So frail is our nature, 'this pleasing anxious being' has so fascinating an influence over our affections; so dismal are the accompaniments, and so dark our notions of death, that this is often the case with the best, as well as the worst of mankind. The hardened Shimei, whom nothing could have awaited in this world, but mortification and disgrace, crouched ignobly to the king, whom he had abused, that he might preserve his life: and the good Hezekiah, whom "glory and honour and immortality"^d awaited in a better world, when apprized by a Prophet of approaching dissolution, "wept sore^e." This is an infirmity of our nature, in good men a deplorable infirmity. But we may learn from the Psalmist, that there is an attainable freedom from it: and who shall proclaim the value of this to beings, who with unquestionable certainty are journeying to the tomb? Let us, then, consider what are the evils to be encountered, in passing through

^c Ps. xxiii. 3.^d Rom. ii. 7.^e Is. xxxviii. 3.

“ the valley of the shadow of death :” and observe, as we proceed, how well and sufficiently calculated the instructions and comforts of religion are, to fortify the faithful against them. “ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

In the first place, the pains of death must be encountered by us ; and these fill many minds with dismay. God has been pleased, notwithstanding the redemption of our race from utter destruction, to leave in the world demonstrations of their fall, and of His displeasure at iniquity, in the sorrows and anguish which accompany their mortality. We come into the world helpless and distressed, and we leave it conflicting with pain. Sickness, dying languor, the burning bosom, the aching temple, the wearied limbs, the agonizing convulsion, and the panting, fluttering heart, these direful offsprings of transgression, which surround the valley of dissolution, increase its terrors : and who can contemplate, without some anxious emotion, the dark idea of that shock, which shall dissolve the union of soul and body, and extinguish the vital flame ? Under these, and whatever other pains we may be called to encounter in the conflict with death, where shall the generality of mankind find support ? Shall they have recourse to the hilarity of life ? Ah ! these are the hours, in which they will “ say of laughter, It is mad : and of mirth, What doeth it^f.” Shall they betake themselves to philosophy ? Alas ! to but few of mankind does philosophy come, and of those few, she changes not the aspect of their suffering ; she sheds no grace of heavenly meekness to consecrate their fortitude ; but supports by hardening or

^f Eccles. ii. 2.

by flattering the sufferer. Amidst the agonies of the vale of death, there is no unfeigned, and adequate support for men, but that which is derived from the Gospel of God. This inspires the only true motive, and furnishes the only efficacious means of a sincere and steady composure; yea, of a reasonable triumph, amidst the distresses which may attend dissolution. By that sublime influence, which consecrates all the acts and events of life to moral purposes, it converts the sufferings of nature into occasions of meekness, patience, and holy submission to the will of God. It sets before us the animating example of our Redeemer, enduring without a murmur the utmost agonies which death could inflict: and bids the Christian, with a voice that persuades while it bids, to imitate his Lord. It brings to us the aid and comfort of the Holy Spirit, through whose sacred influences the departing good man is enabled in "patience to possess his soul^g," when his body is racked with the tortures of his condition. Conscious of the Divine presence and favour, he bears with calmness the burden appointed him. Amidst his pains, there is heard the voice of heavenly consolation: "My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth^h." It is the voice of the Most High God, his Creator and Redeemer. He listens, and his pains are lightened. The hand which smites, he sees stretched out to sustain him. His flesh and his heart may fail, "but God is the strength of his heartⁱ:" and is able, he knows, when the dissolving dart shall strike through his frame, to support him with the wholesome strength of His own right hand.

^g Luke xxi. 19.

^h Heb. xii. 6.

ⁱ Ps. lxxiii. 26.

In hours of extremity, he may, indeed, groan; and “O my Father,” he may be ready to say, “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me^k!” For Jesus, that He might be “touched with the feeling of (*all*) our infirmities^l,” thus deprecated the agonies of the hour of darkness. But it is a momentary and qualified wish. Recollection and the Comforter return to his soul: and the language is triumphant of the lips which are trembling with anguish, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it^m?”

Again. The valley of death is rendered terrible to man, because it interrupts and terminates all his earthly pursuits and expectations. “When the breath of man goeth forth, he shall turn again to his earth: and then all his thoughts perishⁿ.” Life, chequered as it is, has strong attractions, by which our souls are riveted to it. For when we become wedded to our habits, and the projects, and pursuits, to which our faculties have been devoted, it is painful to think, there is an everlasting end. Every condition has something to engage our affections. The ease, the distinction, and the magnificence, with which the wealthy can gratify themselves, render death unwelcome to the rich. And the poor have their comforts, and purposes, which they reluctantly resign to be terminated for ever. To the studious it is sorrowful, that he must be taken from the paths of investigation, and the labours and pleasures, wherewith his mind delighted itself, must be ended. And the virtuous cannot think without regret of doing no more those works of justice, and mercy, and piety, by which they advanced the happiness of men, and obtained to themselves an agree-

^k Matt. xxvi. 39.

^m John xviii. 11.

^l Heb. iv. 15.

ⁿ Ps. cxlvi. 3.

able satisfaction. The eagerness which we feel to avoid the tomb, is much increased by the remembrance, that in it there are none of our pursuits, and occupations, “nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom^o.” But religion teaches to consider all the possessions and pursuits of this life, as subordinate to the great concerns of eternity; as of little consequence, but as they advance those concerns; and as of no value, when the end of them is accomplished. She opens too, to the faithful the prospect of such new scenes and occupations, as shall more than supply the place of those that are to be left. Is it the mansions of magnificence, and the pleasures of affluence that we regret to leave? They fade into nothing when contrasted with the mansions of our Father’s house^p, and “the pleasures which are at His right hand for evermore^q.” Is it the delight of scientific pursuits and acquisitions, which we reluctantly resign? What are the attainments of wisdom, which, with our encumbered faculties, we make in this state in which “we know in part^r,” compared with the intelligence which shall be poured upon the soul in that state, in which we shall “know even as also we are known^s.”

Another evil which we must encounter in passing “through the valley of the shadow of death,” is the separation from the objects who were endeared to us, and the scenes and pleasures which delighted us in the present world. Here is poignant grief. The fond husband must leave the beloved of his bosom; must leave her to her own fortitude and fate, in this mutable and careful existence. The affectionate mother must resign her darling offspring to she knows not what trials, dangers, and sorrows,

^o Eccles. ix. 10.

^p John xiv. 2.

^q Ps. xvi. 11.

^r 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^s 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

in this evil world. Our friends and companions, with whom “we took sweet counsel together,” and who were dear to us as our own souls, we must leave, to see them no more in these earthly forms, in which we have known and loved them. They may mitigate for us the sorrows of disease. They may soothe our apprehensions on our way, and with piety’s sweetest offices encourage our hopes. But they can accompany us, only to the gate of death. There they must leave us. We must be parted from each other; we to pass into regions, from which we shall return to them no more; and they to be left weeping together on the gloomy confines of the vale. And how happy are those, with whom in this dreadful moment God remains; who do not pass through the solemn gate *alone*; but, when all earthly friends have retired, have the “Father of their spirits” with them. In Him they discern a Being dearer, and more excellent, and more desirable to their souls, than any they leave upon the earth. To His providence they are able with holy confidence, to consign the objects, for whose protection and welfare they feel a tender concern. Instead of the beings and pleasures, from whom death takes them, He converses with them on their way of nobler associates, purer pursuits, and pleasures that will be eternal. With the “rod” of His power, and the “staff” of His promises, He sustains and comforts them, in making their painful resignations: and through the declarations of His mercy they are enabled to hope, that the virtuous objects of their affection will, one day, be found in heavenly forms, made heirs with them of a better happiness in a region, where there will be no more death. ‘I leave them,’ says the expiring Christian, when he looks

¹ Ps. lv. 14.

² Heb. xii. 9.

around upon those, with whom nature, or love has connected him, ‘ I leave them in the care of that Being, who made me the instrument of their happiness, and is able to make them happy without me. Presently they will follow me, as I am following those of my connections who are gone before me. And if they shall be found worthy, God will one day make us happy again together, in His unchangeable kingdom.’ Were it not for these principles and hopes, which religion inspires, I know not how a heart, that is fond and sensible, could sustain the thought of being torn by death from the dear objects and social pleasures of this present life. But when the promises of revelation are disclosed, there is reason, and to those who “ have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come ^x,” there is peace, in acquiescing in the privations, to which death necessarily subjects us. In the prospects of heaven and eternity, earth, and the connections and pleasures of earth, appear of subordinate consequence; and “ God is all in all ^y.” Gracious Being, when I shall pass “ through the valley of the shadow of death,” Oh! let Thy presence go with me. It shall be more to me than parent or child, than friend or brother. For “ whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I can desire in comparison of Thee ^z.” Let me, in the vale of terrors, but behold Thy face in righteousness, and “ though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear ^a.” Let me, when I must leave at the entrance of the tomb all earthly associates, have but “ the light of Thy countenance ^b” with me, and I shall be satisfied with it! Though the vale be gloomy, if Thou art with me, I shall go on my “ way rejoicing ^c.”

^x Heb. vi. 5.

^y 1 Cor. xv. 28.

^z Ps. lxxiii. 24.

^a Ps. xxvii. 3.

^b Ibid. iv. 6.

^c Acts viii. 39.

Another thing, which renders “the valley of the shadow of death” terrible to many, is the darkness with which it is encompassed. It is awfully still. It is dreadfully gloomy. Shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it. I see the infidel approach its entrance. To him it is dismally obscure. Bones and ashes are all he can discover. And his heart recoils with unutterable horror, from such an extinction of his being. I see the vicious approach it. To them the gloom is terrible. Conscience fills it with ghosts and spectres, and images of terror. They shudder as they enter. They cry aloud for light. And whom, indeed, do I see unappalled by the darkness and dismal accompaniments of the grave, but those, upon whose minds the blessed Redeemer hath opened the visions of immortality? To them “there ariseth up light in the darkness^d.” The hand which holdeth “the keys of hell and of death^e,” hath rolled back the clouds which hung over the valley of death. The voice, at which the devils tremble, hath chased from it the images of fear, and spectres of despair. To the sincere followers of the Lamb, it is not a valley of unknown windings, and uncertain end. They see, indeed, that it is a desolate place. But they are taught, that it is the path by which God hath connected this present stage of our existence with the next. They know that it is the passage, through which the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and righteous men of every age, have gone to the fruition of glory. They consider it as the valley which their Lord hath travelled, subduing in it every thing which could molest or dismay them; and opening through it the way to His heavenly kingdom. They enter it, therefore, without fear, or perplexity, having the “Spirit

^d Ps. cxii. 4.

^e Rev. i. 18.

of truth^f for their guide, and persuaded by Him, that, desolate as is the path, it will conduct them to the regions of everlasting day. Blissful light, which religion, sent by our compassionate Creator, sheds upon the tomb! How happy the relief which it gives from the timidity of ignorance, and the anxiety of doubt! Those terrors, at least, which its darkness gave to “the valley of the shadow of death,” are of small power, now that it is illumined with the instructions of the Almighty, and declared by Him to be our path to immortality.

But the greatest of all the causes of anxiety and fear, which the children of men encounter at the approach of death, is the apprehension of the judgment which will ensue. Little as they think of it in life, most men are sensible, when they come to die, of the account they must give to God. Their strength being prostrated; the schemes and pursuits which absorbed them being dissolved; their temporal joys all palling on their senses; and every thing in which they sought their comfort, every thing upon which they placed their reliance here, being found useless: they begin to feel their dependence upon an invisible power, and, at length, are thoughtful of the retribution to come. The bar of the Almighty, if it have not been regarded before, will force itself upon the thoughts of the soul, in “the valley of the shadow of death.” And who can sustain unmoved, the contemplation of its majesty, or of the issues to be tried before it?

To the man, who is not at peace with God; who has with him no evidence of pardon and Divine favour; but finds himself going to the tribunal of Heaven with all his imperfections, naked and unatoned; to such a man, the apprehension of the judg-

^f John xiv. 17.

ment to come cannot but be exceedingly terrible. For how shall he appear before the holy and righteous God? What plea shall he urge with the Most High, that He should pardon and exalt him, and give him “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified^g?” He is conscious of innumerable offences against his Maker, for which he can make no reparation. In the account he is to give of the deeds done in the body, alas! he finds nothing of faith or fidelity. Conscience and revelation direct his attention to a throne. But it is a throne, out of which “proceed lightnings and thunderings and voices^h.” He expects to meet a Judge. But from this Judge, he would call upon the rocks to hide him, and the hills to cover him. It is the necessity of giving an account of themselves to this Judge, and the fear of His just award, that renders terrible to so many the summons to pass through the vale of death.

But in the bosom of the Christian, called of God in Christ Jesus, and “turned” from the error of his ways “to the wisdom of the justⁱ,” very different are the emotions, excited by the contemplation of the untried scene, to which death will conduct him. He, too, is conscious of sin. He is conscious also, of his utter inability to make to his Maker any atonement for his offences. But he has been unto the Son of God, that he might obtain life. He has found Him an appointed Mediator, “in whom men have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of their sins^k.” He has taken of that blood, and sprinkled it upon all his garments; and while carrying it upon him has sorrowed for the sins, which rendered it necessary it should be shed, and has aspired after the holiness and immortality, to

^g Acts xx. 32.

ⁱ Luke i. 17.

^h Rev. iv. 5.

^k Col. i. 14.

which it hath redeemed him. From this great Mediator he hath received in the Gospel the promise, and in the sacraments the pledges, of pardon and grace, of peace with the Father, a resurrection from the grave, and everlasting life. This promise is assured to him by the oath of God. These pledges are sealed by the effectual co-operation of the Holy Ghost. And in the love and joy, peace and long-suffering, goodness and patience, meekness and temperance, faith and charity, which are shed abroad in his heart and conduct, he has the fruits of the Spirit witnessing unto him that he is a child of God; begotten again to the liveliest and most joyful hopes, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. From him, therefore, the terrors with which the expectation of a consequent judgment arms death, are turned away. To the God, into whose presence he is going, he can look, as to a reconciled Father and friend. In the Judge, at whose tribunal he must appear, he can thankfully confide, as in one "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way¹," and has united him to Himself by dear and indissoluble ties. The strength of sin over him is broken. The promises of God are with him. The Spirit of God is with him. The oath of God is with him. And in the blood, and righteousness, and intercession of his Redeemer, he knows there is a treasure of merit and atonement; upon which when the Father looketh, He will embrace with everlasting mercy those, who through faith and obedience have endeavoured to secure an interest in it. Great, therefore, is his peace. The bar of the Almighty is changed to him into the Mercy Seat. The vail that was before it is rent in twain. He sees Jesus, the great High Priest, pre-

¹ Heb. v. 2.

senting the blood of the sacrifice, “ which taketh away the sin of the world ^m.” “ Son,” he hears the Father say, “ all Thine are Mine ⁿ. And I give unto Thee power over all flesh, that Thou shouldest give eternal life to as many as I have given Thee ^o.” The penitent believer here forgets his mortality. His heart in the approach of death is glad; and his glory rejoices. His “ flesh also shall rest in hope ^p.”

In short, a sense of the presence of God, with an assurance of His pardon and favour, makes any condition easy, and any place peaceful. In “ the valley of the shadow of death” it is the soul’s amulet, its support and joy. Pain loses much of its power; the adversary of the soul flees to his place; temporal pursuits and advantages are willingly resigned; the poignancy of leaving our earthly friends is mitigated; the darkness of the valley is illumined and cheered; and the dread of judgment is converted into the peaceful hope of pardon and immortality, through the efficacy of those principles and that spirit, which belong to those who love God. “ Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace ^q.”

These consolations and instructions, so important, my brethren, to us, whose progress in life is but an advancement towards “ the valley of the shadow of death,” were very strikingly illustrated and confirmed in the recent death of some members of our communion. To the surviving friends of the deceased, it is necessary for me to utter the words of consolation? A voice from heaven has proclaimed, that “ blessed are the dead which die in the Lord ^r.” Rather, let me beseech you all, my hearers, to bring

^m John i. 29.

ⁿ Ibid. xvii. 10.

^o Ibid. ver. 2.

^p Ps. xvi. 9.

^q Ibid. xxxvii. 37.

^r Rev. xiv. 13.

yourselves into that course of faith and obedience, whose progress is safe and pleasant, and whose end is happy and glorious. However light your thoughts may now be; however gay your lives; however brilliant your prospects; one thing only is certain to you, that death will be the end of your career. To meet it without fearing any evil is a noble attainment, a most desirable happiness. And it is the privilege of those, and those only, who are furnished from the armoury of heaven with what the "Spirit of truth"^s has styled "the whole armour of God."^t With this armour fortify yourselves against the day of need. Delay not to buckle it on, and to prove it, till you see the king of terrors approaching with his hosts of evils. Those dispositions towards God and men, which you would wish to carry into the other world, should be sought and cherished, before you are reduced to the bed of death. For then the corruptible body may weigh down the incorruptible mind; and though the "spirit should be willing, the flesh may be weak."^u While, therefore, it is "well with you"^x, take to yourselves "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day. Let your loins be girt about with truth, and have you on the breastplate of righteousness; let your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."^y Thus fortified, you will

^s John xiv. 17.

^t Eph. vi. 13.

^u Matt. xxvi. 41.

^x Deut. v. 33.

^y Eph. vi. 13—18.

be in the best condition to share the triumphs of those who are gone before you ; and may partake of the holy comfort, with which the Psalmist solaced his soul : “ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

SERMON LXXX.

—◆—
A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.
—◆—

JOB, xxxv. 14.

Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him ; therefore trust thou in him.

THIS chapter is part of a conversation which Elihu had with the renowned sufferer of the East. He appears to have possessed juster sentiments of God, and His government, and a tenderer sympathy with the miserable, than the rest of Job's comforters : and his discourse was not involved in the reproof, by which Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were condemned. The words of the text form one of the finest, and most forcible expostulations, which could have been used with a man amazed by the strangeness, and awed by the weight of his sufferings ; and are not unworthy to be pondered by us on every occasion, when in the emphatic language of Scripture the Almighty " hideth His face ^a." " Although thou sayest thou shalt not see Him, yet judgment is before Him ; therefore trust thou in Him."

These words suppose, in the first place, that there are seasons and situations, in which the ways of Heaven seem dismaying and inexplicable :

^a Job xxxiv. 29.

Secondly, they assure us that notwithstanding this, unchangeable righteousness is the eternal rule of the government of God :

And from this consideration, they, in the third place, encourage us to maintain in every situation, in which His providence may place us, a humble and obedient reliance upon His holy will.

That there are seasons and situations, in which the ways of the Most High do seem dismaying and inexplicable, is abundantly evident, to whatever department of His government we turn our eyes. If we look into the natural world, we shall not always find obscured the God of nature. Here is not always the fruitful season, and the unclouded day. The Deity, who is known to us through the benevolence of His works, does sometimes clothe Himself in all the terrors which the elements He has created can furnish. Dread thunders, and dire pestilence, at His command spread terror and death through the air. The earth quakes, and the busy city with the peaceful plain are alike entombed within its bosom. Instead of the gentle dew in which He refreshes, and the generous shower in which He nourishes the earth, He sometimes comes in a tremendous torrent, sweeping beauty from nature, and sustenance from man. If we look into the social department, here, too, we shall find His ways mysterious. There are times, when the protection of His providence would seem to be withdrawn from society. Its interests appear subject to the caprices of fortune, and the passions of men. Who can discover the known marks of His providence, when the welfare of communities appears dependant on the will of the strongest, and this superior strength is possessed by some inhuman monster, thirsting for the blood and rights of his fellow men ? Impenetrable is the vail which conceals the issue of His purposes,

when the charms of society are blasted, and its young and useful members suddenly cut down; while they who stand alone, and seem cumberers of the earth, are permitted to remain and thrive. Who can fathom the counsels of His will, when in His moral creatures, that reason by which He has dignified them, is suddenly extinguished, or the bodies and faculties, by which He has so happily fitted us for intercourse with each other, are converted into monuments of our frailty and misery?

If we turn our attention to the moral department, here, too, we shall find occurrences to astonish and perplex us. Affliction maintains a powerful and oppressive dominion among the sons of men. In the form of vice, of adversity, and of death, she stalks through the world, obscuring the sun-beams of heaven with her shadow, and spreading dismay by her mien. And is it upon the vicious that she chiefly lays her scourge? Alas! They frequently are seen upon the high places of the earth, basking in sunshine, and trampling upon merit: while virtue, weighed down with accumulated sorrows, in lonely retirement bleeds and weeps. It is not uncommonly the lot of the righteous to bear the heaviest burdens, and experience the severest trials of life. In the management of their allotments, the ways of the Deity are inscrutable. The pious Job, and the zealous Peter are left to be tempted, the one to distrust, the other to deny, his Lord. The former is supported and triumphs; the latter falls. Again. Peter weeps bitterly, and is recovered from the most heinous offence: while for a smaller one, Esau “found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears^b.” How oft have we seen the arrows of the Almighty, lodged in the bosoms which were

^b Heb. xii. 17.

anxious to beat but to His service: nay, how oft has the Church, the object of His professed, His fondest regard, been left, according to the beautiful allusion of the Prophet, “as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city^c.” In the dispensations of His grace, as well as of His providence, in the moral as well as in the natural world, the Most High asserts His sovereignty; “and His ways are past finding out^d.”

When we compare the terrors of nature with His benevolence who rules her movements; when we contrast the triumphs of iniquity in the world, with His power and holiness by whom it is governed; when we combine the afflictions of the virtuous, and the trials of the Church, with His love to whom they are devoted: it must be confessed there are seasons, when he whose faith is most firmly fixed, may be ready to exclaim with the amazed Prophet, “Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour^e!”

But, Christian, pause. Let not the phenomena of nature impair thy admiration of her usual course, nor shake thy confidence in the wisdom and benevolence of her Author. “Although thou sayest thou shalt not see Him, yet judgment is before Him.” When we consider how much order and benevolence there is in the general dispensations of God, and reflect upon the narrowness and imperfections of our views; it would be a candid, and becoming conclusion, if we had no other light upon the subject, that the allotments of His providence which we do not understand, are, nevertheless, adjusted by rules of eternal equity and goodness. But we have the plea of reason enforcing this conclusion. To suppose that God, having made the world, has left it to

^c Is. i. 8.^d Rom. xi. 33.^e Is. xlv. 15.

itself, is impossible. It would not comport with the wisdom, power, and goodness, which are essential to the nature of God. If, however, He exercise a government over the affairs of the world, it must be a moral government. To suppose Him exerting a partial, or passionate, or despotic, or irregular control over the events of time, would argue impossible imperfections in the Deity, and greatly weaken the obligations of His laws. His government must be as pure, just, and benevolent, as His nature; and consequently, righteous in every measure of it; seeking unceasingly the manifestation of justice, and the melioration and happiness of the creature.

In confirmation of these deductions, we have the testimony of Scripture, from which we derive our best and surest knowledge of the nature and designs of the Deity. Revelation assures us, that “the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works^f.” It teaches us to consider the most extraordinary dispensations of Providence, the most mysterious and dismaying occurrences of life, not as the offspring of chance, nor as deviations from the eternal rule of rectitude; but as appointed by Him for the furtherance of glorious purposes, which His justice and goodness conspire to promote. He has a scheme, a just and stupendous scheme, a scheme of infinite benevolence in the administration of His government. Its end is the improvement and exaltation of our race. To give it efficacy, the Scriptures represent Him as sparing no pains; as giving the Beloved of His bosom to suffer and to die. And who that contemplates this scheme of redemption, can doubt that all his dispensations are worthy of Himself, and ultimately conducive to the general good? When the light of revelation rises, it disperses

^f Ps. cxlv. 17.

the clouds which in the seasons of calamity surround and seem to conceal the Most High. We behold Him in a manner, worthy of the Judge of the universe, and Father of our race, administering a government, which exhibits the most wonderful and perfect union of mercy with justice, of righteousness with peace: and pledging Himself, that the result shall be, what every virtuous being should wish it to be, the highest possible good to His creatures. Though for a season His footsteps may be unknown; though in the day of calamity we may look in vain for the light of His countenance; though afflictions may appear to interrupt the flow of His mercies; and to the good may be allotted the greatest portion of distress: yet is there no change in His purposes, nor can there be unrighteousness with God. All His dispensations, as well as His precepts, are done in truth and equity. Yea, doubtless, “ judgment was laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet^g,” when in the hour of deepest sorrow His beloved Son was left to exclaim, “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me^h?” We cannot reconcile any other opinion with our faith in His word, nor indeed in His being. We must abandon our belief in His government, and abide the dreadful consequences of relinquishing our hold upon this only rock amidst the billows of life; or must, though “ clouds and darkness are round about Him,” believe that “ righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throneⁱ.”

From this great truth the inference is clear and reasonable, that we ought to maintain, in every situation in which His providence places us, an unshaken trust in His goodness, and obedience to His will. Nothing more frequently distresses the feelings, and disturbs the principles of men, than the

^g Is. xxviii. 17.

^h Matt. xxvii. 46.

ⁱ Ps. xcvi. 2.

inscrutableness of the dealings of God. But, my brethren, are the measures of His government wrong, because they do not coincide with our partial views? Are the methods of His providence to be condemned, because they cannot be comprehended by our limited understandings? An ignorant rustic, should a spring, or single wheel of a watch fall into his hands, would not perceive its design, and might rashly suppose it wrought to no purpose: but in the hand of a skilful artist, it becomes the principal mover of a machine, regular, beautiful, and of great utility. We form our judgments of detached parts of the economy of the Most High, we judge too by the present event without knowing its connections or result, and we judge, generally, under the influence of some one or other of our passions. Thus circumstanced, we cannot but be incapable of fathoming the counsels, or estimating the deeds of the Most High. That His ways are mysterious, should fill us with humility. It should inspire us with reverence and godly fear; but it ought not to excite our surprise. For who are we, frail beings of yesterday, and limited in our duration and views by the narrow boundary of the present? who are we, and what are our pretensions, that we should expect to be censors of the ways of God?

We are assured by reason and by Scripture, that His government is infinitely, and uniformly righteous. In the gift of His Son for our salvation, He has offered us the greatest pledge we are capable of receiving, that His aim, His wish, His constant care is the preservation and happiness of His offspring. Would we be willing to take the management of events from a Being thus infinitely holy, thus benevolently inclined? Are not our interests, and the interests of our friends, and of all our fellow beings, as safe in His hands, as we should wish them to

be? Are they not, indeed, safer than they possibly could be, under any other circumstances whatever? Amazement, then, at His dealings should never excite distrust. Our reliance on His goodness should stand like the rock, which ages have rooted in the bosom of the earth, unchanged, unshaken by the storm. The darkness which sometimes envelopes His providence, instead of interrupting, should rather call forth our unqualified resignation, and obedience to His will.

It is true, affliction will pour dismaying thoughts into the soul. We are bowed to the dust by the Being who loves us. He withdraws His smiles from those, whom He came to save. He wounds us in the tenderest part. For this we are distressed. But if to fill us with a sense of our frailties; if to remind us of His sovereign power; if to detach us from the delusions of time and sense; if to reclaim us to the paths of righteousness; if to lead us to the Mediator, and cause us to know the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection:—if these be the end of our afflictions, how benevolent are His purposes; how paternal are the chastisements of His hand! And, surely, we can never be faithful to ourselves in our use of adversity, and not find it productive of some of these fruits.

In men assured of the perfection of a Governor, and of the principles by which He acts, it is absurd to be dissatisfied with measures, which they can see but in part. The most afflictive and inexplicable dispensations may often be the springs of the most important and happy operations. The speaker would modestly observe, that the pains and calamities under which himself has recently laboured*, were a

* This Discourse was preached at Newport, R. I. in April, 1804, and the 'pains and calamities' here alluded to, were probably the dangerous operation the Author had undergone, of the extraction of a large wen from his neck. See the Memoir, post,

small price for the experience they brought him of the power of the Almighty, to support His servants under any emergency; and as well to resuscitate our bodies after they shall have slept in the dust, as to cause the flesh which had been torn, divided, and benumbed, to become new, and heal. Yes, Thou gracious Being, in Thy darkest recesses and heaviest dispensations, Thou art just and good. Under the influences of Thy Spirit, “our tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope^k.” Incense, therefore, shall arise to Thee even from the furnace of affliction. It is the very consideration of our inability to scan immediately the counsels of the Most High, which should preserve us from suffering our trust in Him to be shaken by the tribulations of life. We should gather around us as many virtues as we can, and, amidst the gloom that surrounds us, and the raging of the storm, repose ourselves upon His wisdom, righteousness, mercy, and truth.

Thus we have illustrated the greatest part of Elihu’s expostulation with the afflicted Job. May the important, and consolatory truths it has led us to contemplate, have their merited influence upon our thoughts and conduct, under every calamity of life! Many of you, beloved, have recently felt the afflicting hand of God. You have been bereaved of your friends and acquaintances by solemn dispensations of His providence, and are come up to His house, mourning. Listen to the instructions of His word. Learn from the oracles of truth, that however distressing are the events of life, righteousness and goodness guide the hand by which they are allotted. While, therefore, you mourn the partner, the parent, the child, gone down to the chambers of the dead,

^k Rom. v. 4.

consider the wisdom, the justice, and the mercy of the Deity, as so many comforters calling tenderly upon you, to be still in your sorrows, and sanctify Him in your hearts. And let us all, my friends, learn from what has been said, to preserve in every situation an unshaken reliance on the love of the Almighty, and a stedfast obedience to his will. Art thou distressed with a sense of thy sinfulness? Abide thee by the mercy-seat. Say not in thy heart, "Thou shalt not see Him," but recollect the soothing declaration, "He knoweth whereof we are made, He remembereth that we are but dust^b." Art thou alarmed by the occurrences of life? Remember, that "though touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out, He is," nevertheless, "excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice^m;" He will not suffer His truth to fail. Art thou bowed down with affliction's burden, with unjust aspersions of thy fame, the loss of thy property, or the death of thy friends? In thy distress, be not dismayed. The bitter plant is sometimes the medicine of life. The blackest cloud, by which fair nature is shrouded in gloom, carries often the shower which fertilizes and refreshes her. Reflect how partial and finite are thy views. Assure thyself, from reason and Scripture, of the benevolence and rectitude of God's government. Ponder the amazing pledge of His love, which He has given thee in Jesus the Mediator. This faithfully done cannot fail to calm thy soul in her most sorrowful hours: and to inspire thee with the resolution, at once the fruit, the support, and the glory of Job's piety; yea, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Himⁿ."

^b Ps. ciii. 14.

^m Job xxxvii. 23.

ⁿ Job xiii. 15.

SERMON LXXXI.

ON THE MISERIES OF LIFE.

ST. JOHN, XIX. 41.

There was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre.

“MAN is born unto trouble^a.” The scenes of life are perpetually varying; and in every scene, affliction has a conspicuous place. The busy children of men enter upon the stage of action, flushed with the expectation of happiness. Their pulse beats high. Hope animates their bosoms with the prospects which fancy sketches. They look around; the world is as “a garden” before them, lively and pleasant: and they fondly expect to take their pastime in it, moving from pleasure to pleasure, and regaling themselves long with unfading delights. Deluded mortals! The pleasure-ground of Joseph is a picture of life. “In the garden there was a sepulchre.”

It is probable that the taste of the Arimathean may be questioned in this refined age. What avails it, it may be asked, to bring often to recollection the miseries of our condition? Are not the joys of life sufficiently imperfect, without blending with them the symbols of sorrow, the monuments of mortality? Ah, my friends, it were happy for us, if our estimate

^a Job v. 7.

of this present state might be rectified by its miseries. We need a finger, to point out constantly to us the “vanity” of things “under the sun^b.” We need a voice to proclaim daily in our ears, Remember that thou art mortal. Obvious it is, that there are evils in the world. Our earthly joys are all alloyed. Our temporal pleasures have all an end. The countenance of mirth, which to-day beams full with the expression of gladness, is to-morrow covered with gloom. The treasure of health, in which we exult with such thoughtless joyfulness, makes to itself wings, like the riches of the wealthy, and suddenly flies away. Reason, the choicest natural possession of man, is not always secure. The disorders of the body, the wanderings of the fancy, or the winding up of the fine chords of feelings to a pitch, which they are not able to bear, may confuse the rational powers, and convert into frenzy the happiest mind. Death too is ever in our world. Our friends and fellow beings he takes from us, one after another: and whenever he shall lay his hand upon us, we must be bound with his icy fetters, and relinquish all the charms of life for his gloomy domain. Thus, however blissful our situation, and with whatever delights we are surrounded, “in the garden there is a sepulchre.” “Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not^c.”

It is natural enough for the considerate to inquire how the miseries of life found entrance into the creation of God, and I see not how they can explain this mournful part of the Divine economy, but by considering it as the result of transgression. It is surely punishment, whenever the children of a benevolent parent are afflicted: and under the just

^b Eccles. iv. 7.

^c Job xiv. 2.

and compassionate government of the Universal Parent, punishment can never be known but as the consequence of sin. Yes; man must have brought upon himself the sorrows of his condition by disobedience. We carry in ourselves, and behold in the sufferings and mortality of our fellow beings, irrefragable evidence of the unhappy fall, and degeneracy of our race. In an evil hour man built for himself "a sepulchre, in the garden" in which his Maker had placed him; and the awful inheritance has descended to his latest posterity.

It is wise, however, to consider our situation, *as it is*. A state of delusion with regard to the real circumstances of our condition, would be a great misfortune. Whoever acts without a correct view of his powers and position, must always forego the character of discretion, and lose the advantages which wisdom derives from adapting her means to the end, and aiming at those ends only, which are practicable, and of real importance.

I invite you, then, to the "sepulchre," which is ever "in the garden" of life: that you may, in the first place, perceive and remember, that *it is there*. Heedless are most men of death! The young, the gay, and the busy, with what light and careless feet do they move among the pleasures of the earth, regardless of the grave which is under them, and the dangers with which they are surrounded! How many stumble upon the "sepulchre," before they have discovered it in the path! Our eyes are willingly turned from it; for we have not learnt to look upon it without pain. We plant a thousand objects, which hide it from our sight. We twine the flowers of hope, and we bend the vines of pleasure to conceal it from our view. It is "in the garden," but men perceive it not. Too often, alas! they sink into it, before they have considered themselves as

mortal ; unacquainted with the nature of the present life, and unprepared for the issues of that which is to come. But who, in the intervals of reflection, will say that this is wisdom ? “ It is appointed unto” you “ once to die^d.” Death will conduct you to consummate happiness, or unspeakable woe. At any period of your lives, “ in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye^e,” this awful and important change may take place. Let not then the gaities and charms of the world beguile you of such weighty concerns. Have the “ sepulchre” ever in view ; not to interrupt the duties, nor to damp the innocent pleasures of life ; but to prompt you to circumspection and fidelity :—that the great event of your beings, on which such everlasting interests depend, may not come unhappily upon you, and leave you in the untried regions of the eternal world, conscious of heedlessness, destitute of the blessing, and unable, alas, to find a “ place for repentance, though you should seek it carefully with tears^f !”

Again. I have asked you to the “ sepulchre,” that, with it in your view, you may rightly estimate the scenes and objects around you. As mankind in general are unmindful of death, so are they deceived in their valuation of the pleasures and pursuits of life. Time, availing himself of his presence with us, has a competition with eternity for our affections. He decks with fascinating objects this present world. He spreads around its paths many opening flowers. He shows us fruits of various hues, ripening for our future enjoyment. He assures us unceasingly, that he has in store for us greater and greater joys ; and we are led on by him with unsuspecting steps, in expectation of the hap-

^d Heb. ix. 27.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 52.

^f Heb. xii. 17.

piness which shall fill our bosoms with contentment. But mark the deceiver! While he promises to be with us, he conceals his wings. Through the paths of life, while he amuses us with its gaieties, its business, and its hopes, he is leading us to the "sepulchre." Alas! it is not a "sepulchre," like that to which my text refers, in which as yet "never man was laid ^ε." Let us look into it. It contains objects which will teach us impressively, what God our Redeemer is desirous we should learn, the insufficiency of the happiness, which is sought by the children of men, in the occupations, pleasures, and vanities of this imperfect world. Here, ye lovers of riches, ye may behold many, who once as ardently pursued, and as proudly possessed wealth as yourselves. Wrapt humbly in a wasting shroud, they sleep in dust: and the treasures which they so anxiously accumulated, are scattered, or enjoyed, by they know not whom. Here, ye sons of pleasure, ye may find those, whose days were once as mirthful, and their feasts as frolicsome as yours. Barred are their ears to the sounds of mirth; and their bodies, the instruments and sources of all their happiness, are the food of worms. Here, ye ambitious, ye may discover some, who once aspired after pre-eminence, exulted in power, and spurned at control, with a spirit not inferior to yours. Bound are they now with the fetters of the narrow house, and slumber forgotten among the bones of their slaves. And here, ye young and beautiful, ye may see the end of many, who once vied at the ball, and sparkled in the circle with charms related to yours. The rose is gone from the cheek; the lilies of the temple are faded. Dust and corruption is all that remains of what once prided itself in the incense of

^ε John xix. 41.

admiration. If such, my hearers, be the end of all flesh, how absurd is it to glory in the distinctions, how delusive to build upon the prospects, how foolish to be absorbed in the pursuits, of the present world! Its hopes bloom but to wither. Its joys open but to decay. Whichever of its paths we choose, the retired or the open, the sober or the gay, that which has its pleasures in prospect, or that which has them at hand, we shall find them all beset with disappointments, and terminating in a "sepulchre." "If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister^h."

Once more. I point you to the "sepulchre in the garden" of life, that, perceiving the mixed nature, and uncertain duration of all earthly felicity, you may be induced to raise your attention, and devote your affections to the joys of the heavenly world. You are candidates for immortality; called of God in Christ Jesus to the rich inheritance of everlasting life. It cannot but occur to you, that when our adorable Lord had, in this "sepulchre" of the Arimathean, overcome the power of death, 'He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' It is in that kingdom, we are to seek our happiness. All here is perishable. The pictures of earthly felicity, which sanguine fancy forms, will mock our expectation. But in the abode of His glory, the Everlasting Father hath, for His Son's sake, provided the delights with which His redeemed shall be satisfied. There, by "the riverⁱ" of God, is the garden which has no "sepulchre." Its pleasures are perennial. Its joys are nourished with the dews of immortality. On its borders are Cherubim and

^h Job xvii. 13, 14.

ⁱ Ps. xlvi. 4.

flaming swords to exclude for ever the tempter, that he may no more mar the innocence and happiness of the children of the Most High. There walk the heirs of glory amidst unfading flowers, surrounded every where with “trees of life.” They “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth^k.” He gives them robes of pure righteousness. He “leads them unto living fountains of waters^l.” He shows them the trees whose fruit is for meat, and whose “leaves are for the healing of the nations^m.” There do the souls of the righteous rejoice, that they are reckoned among the children of God: and God Himself once more converseth with His offspring, “as a man speaketh unto his friendⁿ.” Happy are the saints, who have already entered into this “garden of the Lord^o.” And happy are we, if our faith and obedience evidence, that we are of the number for whom Jesus Himself, *as a forerunner*, hath entered^p.

Having set before you the uses of the sorrows and mortality, which were introduced into our world by transgression, and are blended with all our joys, I would address myself particularly to the young, in the conclusion of this discourse. They are in the spring of life. Beautiful to them is the “garden” before them, and teeming with innumerable pleasures. Its opening flowers delight their hearts. With sanguine assiduity they are setting a thousand plants of future happiness. They hear nothing but promises of felicity, in the whispering gales which pass by them. But, my youthful friends, “in the garden there is a sepulchre.” Though you are now in the spring time of life, there is a winter in every man’s year. The flowers, with which he solaced himself, must fade. The plants which he cherished

^k Rev. xiv. 4.^l Ibid. vii. 17.^m Ibid. xxii. 2.ⁿ Exod. xxxiii. 11.^o Gen. xiii. 10.^p Heb. vi. 20.

shall wither. Time shall prove treacherous, a spoiler of every joy; and nothing will one day remain, but the "sepulchre" and the relics it embosoms. Build not, then, your hopes upon this present life, whose fashion is constantly passing away. Aim to obtain the love of God. Aspire after the inheritance of virtue. Acquaint yourselves with the Redeemer of your race. Seek your happiness in the immortal pleasures, and noble pursuits of His kingdom. Then will you be no sufferers by the transitoriness of temporal joys. A life you will have, which death cannot reach, "hid with Christ in God^a." The debt of your nature, you shall indeed pay; but when your bodies descend into the "sepulchre," your souls shall be with Him "in paradise^r."

^a Col. iii. 3.

^r Luke xxiii. 43.

SERMON LXXXII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF SETTLED PRINCIPLES IN RELIGION.

ST. JOHN, vi. 67, 68.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

FROM the first promulgation of Christianity, there have been some who were dissatisfied with its evidences, and offended at its doctrines. Pride has always started at sentiments, which its short sight could not comprehend. Depravity has spurned at precepts, which would restrain its evil propensities. Man, so vain of his self-sufficiency, has deemed the necessity, even of the Almighty's aid in effecting his salvation, a false and silly notion. In the chapter from which the text is selected, we find our Saviour stating some of the peculiar principles of His religion. They related to His pre-existence in heaven; to the value of His flesh as "the bread of life^a;" to the supremacy of His Father in the distribution of spiritual favours; and to His own future ascension to "the glory which He had before the world was^b." To Jews, who gloried that their fathers did eat

^a John vi. 35.

^b Ibid. xvii. 5.

manna in the desert; to men who measured truth by its coincidence with their prejudices, and its comprehensibility by their finite minds, these were hard sayings; they could not hear them^c. Though they had witnessed the miracles of Christ; though they had followed Him as a teacher sent from God; His doctrines clashed with their feelings and opinions, and “from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him^d.” It was then, that our Saviour said to the twelve, whom He had selected to be the foundation of His church, “Will ye also go away?” To this affecting question, St. Peter gave that excellent, all-expressive reply, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

This passage of Scripture is capable of very valuable improvement. So long as the human mind continues a tenant in a tabernacle of flesh, till the period arrives when imperfection shall not bound its knowledge, but it shall see with expanded powers, all that through faith it now believes: there will, there must be, some things in revelation, hard to be understood. So long as human nature is averse from spiritual truth, till clad in humility the mind can receive any instruction from the Most High, these mysteries of religion will be made “a stumbling block^e,” and used to prevent men from following Christ. So long as there are infidels in the world, and vehicles for diffusing their sentiments, till the promised time is realized, when no man shall need say to his neighbour, “Know the Lord^f :” the ambassadors of Christ will have occasion to say to His disciples, in behalf of their Master, “Will ye also go away?” Happy for them, if their hearts always dictate the answer of St. Peter! Let us, my

^c John vi. 66.

^e 1 Cor. i. 23.

^d Ibid. ver. 36.

Jer. xxxi. 34.

brethren, consider what it implies, that we may see its force, its fulness, and its beauty. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

The first thing here implied is, that man must have some fixed principles; that if he relinquish Christianity, he must have some other system of opinions; that if he leave Christ, he must seek some other instructor. Whether we consider it as affecting the dignity, or the happiness of man, this sentiment is just. He who has a mind and uses it, cannot be easy, much less positively happy, while wandering in the vague fields of conjecture without any definite and determinate opinions. It were as easy for a vessel destitute of anchor and ballast, to ride safe and stately upon the waters amidst the commotion of the elements, as for him to act with propriety and satisfaction, amidst the commotion of occurrences upon the ocean of life. Would I paint a scene of ignobleness, perplexities, and inconsistencies, it should be the mind of one, who thinks and has no settled principles. It argues a disuse of the most honourable prerogative of men. It exposes to all the wildness, and weariness of uncertainty. It must be less at ease than even scepticism itself, determined to be led by its own blind and maimed offspring.

But in general, some religious system will be necessary. Some sentiment of this kind, man has ever possessed. His mind cannot divest itself wholly of the idea of a supreme Being. It is found with him in the woods of nature, and it follows him to the seats of civilization. Accompanying this, is the consciousness of his moral nature, and the faint sentiment of immortality. These grand principles are the foundation of religion, and, possessed of them, he is naturally led to devise a worship, and

define virtue. He may produce very rude and contradictory schemes; but till he can eradicate from his nature the deeply engraven sentiment of an invisible ruling power, he will, he must have some religious principles. If he be unacquainted with the true God, he pays his homage to the sun, the moon, the departed hero, or the hallowed idol. If he be ignorant of the pure Christian worship, he seeks to honour and please his deity with temples, sacrifices, and holy gestures. If he have not heard the lectures of Christ, he listens to Confucius, to Plato, or to any one who tells him what is right, and discourses upon his chief good. In short, the principles interwoven in his constitution are such, that he will possess some sentiment of duty, and seek some system of right. Nature inclines man to religion. Atheists alone can feel wholly indifferent to it, and of not one of them is she the parent. All other characters must wish to know how they may acceptably worship God, and rightly regulate their conduct. There can be little doubt in the mind of any one, who has studied the history, and observed the nature of man, that if every vestige of Christianity could be swept from the world, he would soon devise for himself some other, and far more imperfect system of religion.

This brings me to observe another thing implied in the answer; namely, that no one can leave the religion of Christ, and better himself by the exchange. Another system so perfect, so consistent, so promotive of virtue, so conducive to public and private felicity, is not within his reach. If he turn back from following the Messiah, he must listen to the less perfect teachers. Upon the most important subjects, they can give no instruction. "To whom shall he go" for a satisfactory account of his own origin, nature, and destination? "To whom shall

“he go” for a discovery of the character and will of the Most High? “To whom shall he go” for rules of conduct, which will ensure him virtue, peace, and joy? “To whom shall he go” for support in the moment of grief, of pain, and of death? “To whom shall he go” for a history of death, and instruction about the final state of the soul? In each, and all of these points, he is deeply interested: but where, if the Gospel is not satisfactory, where shall he get information about any of them? Shall he go to the heathen oracles? Long since they became mute, and when they spake, far from instructing, they perplexed inquirers. Shall he go to the Pagan Philosophers? They cannot speak to him with certainty upon the most important topics, and best show their wisdom by owning their ignorance. Shall he go to Mahomet? His heaven is not rational, his morality is not divine. What there is good in him, is evidently taken from the Gospel, and with it much vile matter is incorporated. Shall he go to the goddess of modern invention, to reason? She frankly avows her inability to teach mankind, and declares that it is only in seasons of insanity, that she has been deified. There is, indeed, none to whom he may go, that can meet and satisfy his inquiries, feel and solace his sorrows, know and confirm his hopes; if he turn his back upon that Messenger from heaven, in whom “all fulness dwells.”

“The words of eternal life” are with Jesus Christ. He hath come from the Father to sinful men with the overtures of everlasting mercy. That atonement for our sins, which we could not make for ourselves, this Son of the Highest hath accomplished with His blood. That aid of the Holy Ghost, by which our spirits, “dead in trespasses and sins^b,” are quick-

^a Col. i. 19.

^b Eph. ii. 1.

ened, He hath obtained for us by His obedience and sufferings. Those shackles of death, with which our nature was bound, He hath dissolved, and hath 'opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers' To you, and to me, and to all who will come unto Him, He is authorized, in behalf of the Everlasting Father, to offer the remission of sins, and everlasting life. By His miracles and doctrines; 'by His cross and passion; by His death and burial; by His glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost;' He hath provided the means whereby we may live; and hath established the assurance of rest and immortality, to the people of God.

This brings me to remark, further, as implied in St. Peter's answer, that an assurance of eternal life is the object of the highest import to man's happiness: and that it is enough to attach one to the religion of Jesus, that in it this most interesting assurance is credibly revealed. And what, indeed, to the unfortunate inhabitants of this region of sin, and mutability, can be so valuable as this doctrine? Such is the condition of society, that a belief in a future retribution seems necessary to secure its interests, and give efficacy to its laws. Such are the circumstances of our present being, that the doctrine of immortality seems almost necessary to give worth to life. Indeed, what without it can explain to our minds the promiscuous distribution of good and evil? What without it can support suffering virtue, or console bleeding affection? What without it can compose the agitated conscience, and convey to the bosom of the penitent sinner the cheering beams of hope and peace? What but the assurance of a resurrection of the dead can stay our tears, when our friends, the dear objects around whom we have entwined our heart-strings, are turned to dust?

What, but the blessed hope of a future existence, with certain knowledge how the transgressions of life may be pardoned and our futurity rendered blissful, can strengthen our steps, when we descend to the grave, and preserve our spirits from despondence? Were we left to sorrow under the consciousness of sin, under the pressure of afflictions, and under the knowledge of our mortality, without any voice to whisper mercy in our ears, or any hand to point our eyes to heaven: how deep the gloom which would hang upon life, how awful the darkness which would envelope the grave! The assurance of another world is the soul's only amulet, amidst the ills of this. It was the want of this assurance, which rendered the best of the heathens dissatisfied with their attainments. Could they have received the Gospel, in which are "the words of eternal life," they would have pressed it to their bosoms, and wetted it with their tears. Well, then, might this doctrine alone attach St. Peter to the religion of his Lord. He heard it taught by Christ. He was convinced of the credibility with which He spake. He believed the grand doctrine, attested by all the evidence which the case would admit. What then, should induce him to leave the teacher of a truth, which yielded the highest satisfaction of which man is susceptible? It is a truth, without which no system would reach the wants, and quiet the anxieties of human nature. In vain would he recur for it to any other source. It could be found only in the religion of Jesus Christ. There was wisdom, therefore, as well as fidelity, in adhering to his Lord; for He, and He only, had "the words of eternal life." And though the good Apostle was afterwards shaken from his stedfastness, it was only for a moment; and let it be remembered, as an instructive lesson to all who are tempted

to apostasy, that when he thought thereon, he “ wept bitterly¹.”

This leads me to observe, lastly, that this answer of St. Peter implies a full satisfaction in the religion of Christ. This is in the highest degree rational. Here all is expressed which it is necessary for man, on earth, to know. There can be no reason, therefore, to expect any further dispensations from Heaven. Compared with this, no system is so consistent, full, and adapted to man’s desires. If the evidences which support it be examined, they are such as the nature of things requires, and broad as any foundation of belief and practice. Are its rules of life studied? They reach every case, and are approved by reason. Is it important what prize is proffered? It is the greatest felicity that can be conceived or desired,—“ eternal life.” Such being the satisfaction which Christians may feel in their religion, we wonder that there should ever be occasion for the question, “ Will ye also go away?” We cannot but unite our voice with St. Peter and say; “ Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

We see then, my hearers, that man ever has had, and will have some religious principles: that it is impossible for any one to leave the Gospel of the Redeemer, and find a system of opinions so suited to his nature and happiness; that “ the words of eternal life,” the object of our highest concern, are with its Author, who alone “ hath brought life and immortality to light².” Contemplating these things, it should seem cause for surprise that, among those who had known “ the truth as it is in Jesus¹,” there should be any occasion for the question, “ Will ye

¹ Matt. xxvi. 75.

² 2 Tim. i. 10.

¹ Eph. iv. 21.

also go away?" But pride has ever turned from humbling truths, and depravity spurned at precepts which would restrain its propensities. We live in an age, in which, alas, the dereliction of Christianity must excite deep regret in the bosom of every friend to truth and mankind. Was the Saviour now upon earth, how often and how anxiously would He repeat the question which He put, in the text, to His beloved twelve! A philosophy has appeared in the world, whose evident object is to raise itself on the ruins of Christianity. It is specious in its appearance, lofty in its pretensions, and addresses itself to those dispositions and properties of men which are most easily deluded. God grant, that in this young and happy country none may be so infatuated as to approach this philosophy, which, like some deleterious plant, covered with luxuriant foliage, and flowers of lively hue, carries in its veins a virulent poison, and sheds a deadly influence upon every thing within its reach. Let us, rather, learn to estimate justly those "words of eternal life," which we have in the Gospel; and to ask ourselves what will be our prospects, to whom we shall go, if we neglect our Redeemer? Lovers of virtue, anxious to elevate your nature by adorning it with the qualities which are "pure," "lovely," and of "good report^m;" is not your way made plain, and your strength increased by the instructions and influences of Christianity? Children of sorrow, whose day of life is overcast with gloom, are not your sighs suspended, and your bosoms composed, when the Angel of the Gospel descends through the cloud, speaking peace to your perturbed spirits, and opening to you a state in which, with your friends, you shall be for ever removed from trouble and death,

^m Phil. iv. 5.

“and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.” Followers of the Lamb, encumbered with the frailties and imperfections of nature, yet conscious of responsibility, and fearfully looking forward to the “judgment to come^o,” is it not your choicest felicity to know, that ye “have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and that He is the Propitiation for your sins^p.” Will ye then go away? Alas, to whom will ye go? Will you leave “the Rock of ages^q,” and throw yourselves upon the unbounded, confused, and perilous ocean of uncertainty? Cleave, rather, to the only hope of this ruined world. Abide in the Lord Jesus. Prize, above all price, the knowledge of His grace and faith in Him. Let the language of your lips and souls in every hour of distrust or temptation be, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

ⁿ Rev. vii. 17.

^p 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^o Acts xxiv. 25.

^q Is. xxvi. 4.

SERMON LXXXIII.



ON THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.



EXODUS, ii. 9.

Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.

THE Christian education of children is among the most interesting, and momentous concerns of the Christian world. A cruel adversary intends the destruction of them all. Nature frames for them, (it is all she can do), frames for them an ark no better, alas! than “an ark of bulrushes^a,” and in it she leaves them to waves, and winds, and monsters, prowling for what they may destroy. The Son of God descends in their exposed situation. He sends His ministering servants, and takes them from it. He procures for them by the order of His providence those, who may protect and nurture them till they shall be grown up for a noble and happy life. And to the parents, the guardians, the sponsors, to whom He commits them, I conceive Him saying in every case, “Take this child, and nurse him for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.”

What are the wages of fidelity in the important

^aExod. ii. 3.

work of the Christian education of Children? Upon this inquiry, my respected hearers, I would invite you to bestow your consideration. For such are these wages, so numerous, so great, and of such duration, that whoever will faithfully estimate and sum them up, shall be unable to refrain from wonder, that all who have children under their care, in the Christian world, are not much and anxiously engaged in nursing them for God.

In the first place then, a part of the reward of fidelity in religiously educating your children, consists in the pleasure of the work. It is an innocent, an interesting, and an honourable occupation. In the performance of it, there is a delight of a pure and durable character, worthy of the intelligence of man. That heart must surely be destitute itself of lively affection for the Deity, and for the truths which He has revealed, which finds no pleasure in guiding the youthful mind to its Creator, and imbuing it with the principles which may remove its deformities, and fit it for eternal life. Do you take delight in raising a precious plant, in propping an opening flower, in guiding a luxuriant vine, in pruning for its health and its beauty a fruitful tree: and shall you not find a much more exalted satisfaction in training the germs of virtue, and cherishing the opening flowers of grace, in pruning from the heart its excrescences, and the branches of its defects, and guiding the disposition into all the forms of beauty? Do you experience a lively gratification in adorning the bodies, accomplishing the manners, and developing the personal beauties of your offspring: and shall you not find higher pleasure in the business of cultivating their minds, adorning them with the qualities and graces in which they will be lovely in the sight of God and of His angels, and nurturing the beauties which you know shall live for ever? Consider

that your children have spirits; consider that they are destined for immortality. Every plant of virtue which you plant in them shall bloom through eternity. By every progress you make in rendering them good, you beautify the intellectual creation of God. What interest does this give to the work of their education! How great the designs it intends! How pleasing the expectations which animate it! “If these little ones” have “angels, who always behold the face of their Father which is in heaven^b,” the delight which springs to these angels from their relation to them, is found, I conceive, in the work of ministering to their salvation.

Again. There enters into the reward of religiously educating children, the pleasure which arises from doing good to society. It is a generous satisfaction, which flows in the bosom of man from the consciousness of having benefited mankind. And who are they that benefit mankind? Let the question be answered by adverting to the sources from which the imperfections and miseries of society proceed. Have they not all proceeded, either mediately or immediately, from the passions and vices, the moral feebleness and spiritual death, to³ which, since the Fall, our race have been subject? And who are they that have most effectually contracted these sources? Let the question be put to Wisdom, who stands by the throne of God, and she will turn from the splendid hero and busy statesman, and fastening her eyes upon the parents, whose goodly offspring are abroad in society, fearing God, practising charity, and subduing in themselves the wrong passions and inclinations of their nature, and cheering their hearts and the hearts of others with the prospect of a better world: and will say of such parents, These are the men. He

^b Matt. xviii. 10.

who introduces the seed of a useful grain into a country, contributes more, as some one has well observed, to the happiness of that country, than its mightiest warrior and most victorious chief. But more highly founded yet is *their* claim to this pre-eminence, whose culture is the hearts of the young, and the seeds they introduce, seeds of goodness, brought by His beloved Son to our world from the garner of God. To know the real condition of mankind, you must go home with them to their business and their bosoms; you must look into their families, their houses, and their souls. It is here, in their domestic scenes, amidst their daily enjoyments and sorrows, that the good is to be weighed, by the amount of which, the measure of their happiness will be most correctly estimated. To this good no individuals, perhaps, contribute more largely than those parents who give to society a race of children, enriched with the principles and habits, on which this good does chiefly depend. Of the high satisfaction, therefore, which rewards him who can say, I have benefited my country, I have added to the happiness and honour of my race; every such parent, whatever be his condition in life, when he looks upon his children, is entitled to partake. It is of such offspring that the Psalmist must be understood to speak, when he says, "Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate^c."

Further. There is high honour in co-operating with God, and great happiness in conforming to the intentions of His providence. Of this honour and happiness they eminently are sharers, who are en-

^c Ps. cxxvii. 5, 6.

gaged in guiding the young children in the paths of His will. Their salvation is dear to God. For it He hath given His Son to live in our flesh, and die upon the cross; for it He hath condescended to furnish the light of His word, and to offer the assistance of His Holy Spirit. The accomplishment of His wishes He has very much confided to their parents, and spiritual guardians. He hath committed to them the care of the souls, as well as of the bodies of their offspring. And in the helplessness of the child and experience of the parent, in the docility of the former and the authority of the latter; a state of things resulting from that order of nature which He himself hath constituted; He doubtless intended a provision for the well-being of His human children, not only with respect to the present life, but also to their eternal existence. The affection which moves the parental bosom is His voice crying, "Take this child, and nurse him for Me." Alas! that through the blindness which has fallen upon our nature, this affection is limited in its views, and so many children nursed only for the world. If there be any pleasure in conforming to the intentions of God's providence, in the order of nature which He hath established; (and probably the degree of this conformity in every person is the exact measure of his happiness;) of that pleasure they will participate, who train their young for their high moral destinies, who nurture them for immortality. If there be any honour in being co-operators with the Most High God; (and it is in this co-operation that the highest seraph of heaven finds the honour in which he most delights himself:) of the honour they may know themselves to be sharers, who conduct their children into the paths, which He hath sent the Son of His love to open for them, and guide them to the cross, on which He hath caused

that Son to be lifted up, that they may look unto Him, and be saved.

Once more. The good of his children is what every parent proposes to himself, as the object perhaps of his fondest desire, as the motive to all his parental conduct. And herein is a large part of the wages of fidelity, in religiously educating them, that thereby their greatest good in this life will be most effectually promoted. It is a perilous and unhappy world, into which you introduce them. And yet the misfortune is, that in education respect is more generally had to its pleasures than its sorrows, to its honours than its snares. The great question concerning your offspring is, where in it shall wisdom be found, and where is the place for satisfaction? Temptation will assail them. Troubles will overtake them. Death will claim them. You have to fortify them against vice, and tribulations; you have to qualify them, if your education of them is adapted to their condition in this world, not only to live, but also to die. Look around you. See in what path they shall be most likely to find peace. Examine the claims of wealth, of honour, of rank, of power, of pleasure. Turn to religion. Institute a comparison between her claims, and theirs. Inquire which of them has most efficacy to quell the passions, which are the parents of evil; to soothe the sorrows, which are the offspring of our condition; to open sources of happiness, at which the weary spirit may always be refreshed; to pour upon life's path an uniform cheerful light; to give to the soul a tranquil, contented character; and to take the barbs from the arrows of death? Such a comparison will assuredly produce a result in favour of a Christian education. 'If there is one condition in this life,' says the sensible and celebrated Bishop Watson, 'if there is

one condition in this life more happy than another, it is surely that of him, who founds all his hope of futurity, on the promises of the Gospel; who carefully endeavours to conform his actions to its precepts; looking upon the great God Almighty, as his protector here, his rewarder hereafter, and his everlasting preserver. This is a frame of mind, so perfective of our nature, that if Christianity, from a belief of which it can only be derived, were as certainly false, as it is certainly true, one could not help wishing, that it might be universally received in the world.' This decision, I doubt not, would be always confirmed by fact. Where indeed will you find a shield to defend your offspring from the ills of life, if you find it not in the Gospel? Where will you find the friend, whom they must every day need, if you find him not in Christ their Redeemer? As you love the satisfaction of promoting the good of your children here, "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord^d." It is a Christian education which will most effectually form in them those qualities of character, which will render them lovely and useful among men; those habits of life, which will be most productive to them of peace and contentment, respectability and health; and those dispositions and hopes, which will smooth their pillows, when their temples shall be throbbing under the sorrows of bereavement, or the pains of death. You may give them wealth, and it may prove injurious to them; you may procure them honours, and these may be a vexation; you may give them knowledge, and even that shall be unsatisfactory, unless you give them instruction in the faith and fear of God. Leave them unblessed with religion's counsels, and unsecure of religion's care; and you may live to see them, if not melancholy examples of

^d Eph. vi. 4.

the unhappiness of unrenewed man, yet halting with dissatisfaction and weariness, in the paths into which you have conducted them, before they have half completed their course; and saying to themselves, perhaps to those who pass by, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit ^e."

This leads me to observe in the fifth place, that the faithful parent has a recompense for his care in the religious education of his children, in the greater security of his own happiness. It is through the child that the heart of a parent is most vulnerable. "My son," says Solomon, "if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine ^f." Ah, from these relations, which were designed by the Creator, to be productive of the sweetest joys of man's sublunary existence, what bitterness has flowed? I see a father in the evening of his life, when nature asks for peace and cheerful hope, waiting with a cheerful bosom and a furrowed brow, for the final rest which seems to him slow in coming. The profligacy of a child has stung for him the joy of life, and is "bringing down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave ^g." In her inmost chamber I see a mother on her bended knees. She is looking to heaven and tears are on her cheeks. For what does she ask? With a trembling lip she ventures to supplicate, that God would forgive and save her offending child. Who can behold them and not remember the sacred record, "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother ^h." Here a drunkard; and there a gambler; here a deceiver; and there a man of blood; here an Absalom; and there a Simeon and a Levi; here a family of contention; and there an unthankful individual;—break down the manly

^e Eccles. ii. 17.

^f Prov. xxiii. 15.

^g Gen. xlii. 38.

^h Prov. x. 1.

strength, which was once employed in their support, and plant in the breasts, which once nourished them, the arrows of an anguish which cannot be uttered. Whence the evil? Either they were not taught sufficiently early, and with sufficient assiduity, the import and authority of God's laws, or their perverse wills were not bent by the parental hand and parental prayers, to an habitual observance of them. For very different surely is the case of those parents, whose children have been brought up at the feet of their Redeemer, and accustomed from their earliest years to admire his precepts, and imitate His life. They are indeed "like olive branches round about" their father's "table¹." The fragrance of their virtues perfumes his house, and all that enter it are refreshed. The holy Dove at times descends upon them to whom, as "olive branches," they are fitly consecrated. The parental eye beholds them with delight, lovely and flourishing, and advancing to a state, in which they shall one day be meet to be transplanted into the heavenly Paradise, the garden of God. What greater earthly solace can parents have than children such as these? But this is not all their present happiness. Parents must die. The hour comes, when your children shall stand around you, and you will perceive that you are leaving them without you, in this evil world. What can mitigate this anguish of death? What but to be able to say of them, when you cast on them your final look, "I am going unto my Father, and their Father; and to my God, and their God^k." They will honour me in their lives when I shall be gone. The Almighty is their friend, and He will protect them. Short is the period, for which we shall be separated. They too will die, and come to me, though I shall not return to them. Happy

¹ Ps. cxxviii. 4.^k John xx. 17.

portion of an expiring parent! “Wages” this, for training his children in the paths of goodness, which more than recompense all his care!

But not in this life is the reward of the faithful in any case complete. By far the largest part of the “wages,” which God, in His mercy, has promised to any of their good works, is reserved to be given them in the great day of the final consummation. And to the Christian parents, whose children shall have been Christians, that day will indeed be a day of unspeakable joy. Imagine yourselves standing with your offspring at the tribunal of heaven. The numerous generations of men, the angels and archangels of God, the seven spirits of the Most High, all are present. Conceive the blessed Son of God taking your children by the hand, and presenting them to the Father as rightful heirs of eternal bliss. Picture to yourselves the ministering spirits clothing them with the “white robes¹,” placing upon their heads the “crowns of glory^m,” and putting into their hands the golden harps on which they are to strike before the throne the strains of celestial gladness. They bow before the Almighty in thankful adoration of Him, for their stupendous inheritance, and turn to you an eye, which speaks a recollection of your care, when you nurtured them for this bliss, and a grateful satisfaction that you are partakers of their joy. The everlasting Father seals their investiture, and bids them “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goethⁿ.” And turning to you, He bids you be ever with them, and smiles complacently on your fidelity. Christians, to such a tribunal you, and your offspring must one day be brought; and joy like this shall in that day be the portion of every parent, who shall be found to have taken his children

¹ Rev. vii. 9, 13.

^m 1 Pet. v. 4.

ⁿ Rev. xiv. 4.

and nursed them faithfully for God. There is an awful contrast to this scene. I cannot describe it. I cannot ask you to imagine your children turned by God from the company of the good, and going away from heaven into regions of darkness, and undiscovered woe. I cannot call upon you either to conceive yourselves, for your criminal negligence, descending with them into the abyss of perdition, or to behold from any station the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever. I cannot bid you hear the accusations, which, from the place of their torments, they utter unceasingly against you. The scene appals the soul. The horror, which the thought of it pours over the mind, is too great to be long endured. Nor can I willingly believe, that to well taught Christians the motive drawn from the miseries of the damned can possibly be needed, when there is set before them the motive, which must surely be irresistible, of beholding their children "shining forth as the sun"^p in the kingdom of God, for ever and ever.

Such are the rewards which should induce you, my hearers, to engage in the Christian education of your children. To such education there have been urged sometimes two objections, which, as they may possibly present themselves to your minds, it behoves me to notice. There are some, who have deemed it unadvisable to prejudice the minds of children upon the subject of religion; conceiving it better to leave them, till they arrive at years of discretion, to choose for themselves. This objection, if religion were a thing of questionable authority or importance, might seem to have some validity. But with Christians, and they are Christians whom I

^p Matt. xiii. 43.

address, the truth of the Gospel is indubitable, and the revelations it contains are acknowledged as the best gift of God to the human race. A thing positively good, yea a good above all other things, a parent surely is bound to secure, if he can, for his child. He might as well refuse to take possession for him, in his minority, of an invaluable estate, because it was doubtful whether, when he should be grown up, he would care to have it.

Beside, this objection if specious in theory, would, it is feared, be found pernicious in practice. Such is the nature of man, that if good principles and habits are not planted in him, the soil of itself, or the enemy that would destroy him, will produce bad ones. If he be not bent to goodness, and pruned to fruitfulness, his growth will be rank and worthless. Go into the woods ; and select there the knotted, and gnarled, and fruitlessly luxuriant vine ; and you will have in it an emblem of those children, for whom no father watches, no mother prays ; whom no kind hand guides and cultivates, as God hath instructed ; but a mistaken philosophy attempts to dignify with the imposing name of children of nature.

Moreover, unto Christians, the will of God is known upon the subject. It is intimated, as has already been observed in the body of this discourse, it is intimated by the order of nature which He has established, to have been His purpose, that parents should have the care of the minds, as well as the bodies of their infants ; and form the morals, as well as the manners of their children. If He have not excluded these little ones from His holy baptism, the admission of them to this rite manifests, how far it is His will, that they should early be devoted to Him, and brought under the influences of the Gos-

pel. And with what believer can there remain a doubt, not only of the expediency of the thing, but of the great obligation to it, who ponders this inspired decision, “These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up⁹.”

The other objection is of a more disheartening character. It is drawn from the ill success which seems, sometimes, to attend the efforts of pious parents. Often, it is said, the reward of carefulness in this matter is not received. Now it is very doubtful, whether in fact the cases are many, in which faithful and complete endeavours of parents to train up their children in the way they should go, do entirely fail. In most cases they unquestionably succeed. So far as we are acquainted with the history of the eminent servants of God, who are immortalized in the record of His holy word, they appear to have been religiously educated in their youth. David and Samuel, and the good Josiah; Solomon, and Obadiah, the virtuous Joseph, and the beloved Timothy, were all brought early in life to the knowledge and fear of God. It is said to be worthy of remark, that most of the Kings of Israel, who had any merit, had received in their youth the instructions of religion, and this in many instances through the care of their mothers. And of those, in the Christian world, who attain to virtue and eternal life, it is not to be doubted, that a large part have received in their earliest years, through the instrumentality of parental or other instruction, that

⁹ Deut. vi. 6, 7.

incorruptible seed of the word of God, by which they were raised to their high inheritance and attainments.

Some cases however there are, in which the expected effects of a religious education seem not to be produced. But in these cases, our judgment should be suspended, till the life is finished. For oftentimes the seeds of goodness are seasonably sown, but the weeds of corrupt nature spring up first and strongest, and choke the better plants. These weeds however have their growth, and wither. And from the beds on which they have fallen and decayed, the seeds which were early sown, and on which have descended secretly and often the powerful influence of a parent's prayer, do, after the lapse of forty or fifty years, at length spring up and produce abundantly in the evening of life the fruits of faith, and righteousness, and peace. Many probably are the instances of this kind, in which parents live not to behold, unless indeed they behold from heaven, the happy effects to their children, of their pious care to educate them religiously.

Let us however suppose the worst. Let us imagine, that on some very depraved being, these parental labours are bestowed in vain. Of whom will the situation be least intolerable, of that parent, who, in rendering to the Almighty his account of the management of his children, shall be able to say, All that I could I did? Or that parent, with whom will remain the bitter, the distracting reflection, But for my negligence to this my child, eternity might have been blissful, who now must go into everlasting woe?

I have detained you long, my brethren, upon this subject; too long I am afraid for your pleasure; but not too long for the importance of the theme. May

God Almighty send his blessing upon what you have heard! Take now your children whom the Son of God delivered from 'the waves of this troublesome world,' and having adopted them as His own, has committed to you to be nurtured for His kingdom: take these your offspring, and nurse them for Him; and in His name, I say unto you, He will in some shape or other, give you your reward.

SERMON LXXXIV.

ON SOLICITUDE FOR THE PROSPERITY
OF RELIGION.

1. SAMUEL, iv. 13.

For his heart trembled for the ark of God.

You have here a picture of good old Eli, in one of the most interesting situations in which man was ever seen. After that terrible defeat which the people of Israel received from the Philistines, in the battle of Aphek, they sent to Shiloh, and had the ark of God taken from its place, and brought among them, hoping that this token of the Divine presence would revive their courage, and preserve them from the hands of their enemies. The rumour of it at first disheartened the foe: but their recent victory, and the exhortations of their leaders, animated them to the onset; and the battle was exceedingly fierce. It was a most momentous combat. The glory of Israel was at stake. The ark of the Covenant was in the field. Eli had now numbered “ninety and eight ^years^a” upon the earth; and was blind. Neither on his limbs, nor yet with his eyes, could he follow that Ark, before which he had so long mi-

^a 1 Sam. iv. 15.

nistered; and from which he had so often received blessings for himself and the people. His soul was filled with anguish, that it had been torn from its place between the Cherubim. He knew it was in danger; exposed to the imprudence and heedlessness of its friends, as well as to the rude blasphemies of the enemy. Nothing could quiet his pious concern. Blind as he was, he crawled to the high road, and with profound anxiety sat there, listening to the approach of every traveller, if haply he might hear from Aphek, that all was well. It is in this situation, that the Scripture presents him to our view, a most instructive and affecting model of genuine piety. "He sat upon a seat by the way side watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God."

It may perhaps appear improbable, that our anxiety will ever be excited as Eli's was. It may be feared, that our piety would hardly rise to the noble measure of his. But we may be led by his example, to observe, in the first place, that a good man will always feel concerned for the safety, honour, and advancement of religion: and, secondly, to consider some of the ways in which he may promote its reputation and success.

In the success of the Gospel, are involved the pleasure and glory of God. The good man considers it as an august display of the Divine perfections, as gaining the Deity everlasting praises from angels and men, as dear to the eternal mind in its design and accomplishment, and as vouchsafed to men in great mercy and trust. As a creature therefore of the Most High God, he will feel concerned for the prosperity of a work, upon which, from before the foundation of the world, his Creator hath bestowed His care, and the success of which He earnestly desires,

and hath sent His Son to promote. He considers Christianity, as opening to the sinner the only means of reconciliation with his Maker; as affording to man the best instructions and assistances for the right management of life; and as offering to the inhabitants of this region of infirmity and sorrow, the most animating motives to virtue and contentment, and the most enlivening prospects of immortality. As a philanthropist, therefore, he will feel interested in the safety of this ark of mercy, before which the penitent may find forgiveness, and the sorrowful and the dying be cheered with soothing consolations, and animating hopes. As a patriot he considers religion essential to the stability, happiness, and prosperity of the state. He will therefore devoutly wish, that the altars of his country may never be destitute of ministers, nor its temples of worshippers and friends. He contrasts with the rude schemes of polytheism and idolatry, which ancient legislators rendered sacred in the state, the pure, the rational, the consoling theology of the Gospel: and his love for his country will lead him to promote such an extension of the knowledge of Christianity, and such an attachment to his doctrines and worship, as may preserve it from being taken away, as it has been from countries which were once Christian, but through ignorance, and coldness, and corruption, are so no more. When he considers the value of this religion to himself; that it is the guide of his youth, the comfort of his age, his joy in prosperity, his solace in adversity, and the staff of his spirit when he shall pass through “the valley of the shadow of death^b;” gratitude to its Author will make him a faithful guardian of the treasure, with which

^b Ps. xxiii. 4.

he is entrusted, and strengthen the pleas of charity, when she prompts him to extend the participation of it. In short, when he compares the objects which religion proposes, with aught else of high estimation, and ardent pursuit; he perceives that without these a man may possess all other things, and be wretched; and that with these, the humblest of the sons of men may be resigned and happy. He knows that her counsels are better than strength; that her promises are preferable to riches; that her joys no pleasures can equal; and that her holy influences alone prepare the soul for heaven. Her nature, therefore, as well as her origin, and the great ends of her mission, render him careful of her honour, and anxious for her renown. He will be filled with delight, when her interests are prospered, and his heart will tremble for them, in the day of corruption.

But hath not the Author and head of the Christian covenant said, that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it^c?” He hath. And though, for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes, it may be appointed to many trials, and often enveloped in apparent dangers, nothing shall destroy it. Like its ancient type, the ark of the whole world, upborne by its own buoyancy, and safe under the guidance of an invisible power, it will rise above every deluge of depravity, which may threaten the world, and rise the sacred deposit of all that can save, enoble, and rejoice our race. But while man continues as he is, proud, corrupt, and hateful of the light, “because his deeds are evil^d,” it cannot be otherwise, than that the religion of our Redeemer should have its adversaries, and be sometimes exposed by its friends. Notwithstanding the assu-

^c Matt. xvi. 18.

^d John iii. 19.

rance, that the Gospel shall ultimately triumph, there may be occasions and reflections which should awaken the good man's solicitude. When philosophy comes forth armed with arrows, which she has winged with wit and dipped in poison, will he not feel fearful that they may wound the lambs of the Redeemer's fold, though by His more wary followers they should be avoided? When the professors of the faith apostatize, or neglect the ordinances of the Church, or relapse from the zeal,^e the holiness, the purity, the circumspection which the Gospel requires; is there not cause for his anxiety, lest others should go away, and the worst enemies of the Saviour be they of His own household? When he ponders the solemn and memorable inquiry of Christ, which the Evangelist hath recorded, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth^e?" is there not enough in this inquiry to excite his vigilance, and call forth his care for the preservation of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints^f?" Evident it is, that Christianity, like the ark of the Covenant for which the Prophet watched, may be endangered by those who place in it their confidence: and there are enemies into whose hands it may fall, and be exposed to contumely, and pollution. These considerations will beget in the bosom of the good man, a constant care for its reputation and prosperity. Not noisy and hollow will his concern for the ark of God be; but sincere and deep as Eli's proved, in the sequel of his story, which, "wheresoever the Gospel is preached in the whole world," is worthy to "be told for a memorial of him^g." As he sat by the way side, one came from Aphek. Mark his solici-

^e Luke xviii. 8.^f Jude 3.^g Matt. xxvi. 13.

tude when he inquires, "What is there done, my son^h?" With inimitable tenderness the messenger replies, "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is takenⁱ." Behold, at the mention of the capture of the ark of his God, the venerable old man swooned, fell backward from his seat, and expired! He could hear of the flight of Israel, with humble acquiescence. He could hear of the slaughter of the people, with silent sorrow. He could hear of the death of his children, with chastised regret. But when the ark of God was taken; when the delight of his heart, the hope of his country, the glory of Israel, was gone; overpowered with sorrow, his spirit failed him; he fell, and died. Sublime piety! Wonderful instance of hallowed sensibility! Long, thou venerable Seer, long as the Scriptures shall endure, piety shall turn with fondness to thy story: and the tear which she drops over thy affecting end, will spring, not less from admiration, than from grief!

But from admiring the concern of Eli for the ark that was in Shiloh, let us be led, secondly, to consider, in what ways we may contribute to the reputation, and prosperity of the ark of the better covenant, "the Gospel of our salvation^k."

In the first place, we should not disguise our belief in the religion of our Lord. Too easily does pride, a dread of the ridicule of the profane, or a coincidence with the current of the world's opinions, deter the disciples of the Redeemer from avowing their attachment, to Him, and their dependence upon His word, for their best principles, and

^h 1 Sam. iv. 16.

ⁱ Ibid. ver. 17.

^k Eph. i. 13.

their dearest hopes. Not so were His first followers; nor so should we be, if we felt as we ought, the value of the ark of the covenant of His mercies, and were sufficiently concerned for its safety and honour. Would we advance the interests of our Saviour's kingdom? Let us be seen in the ranks of His friends, and, as an inspired Apostle exhorts, "Go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach¹."

Again. We may promote both the honour and prosperity of our religion by upholding its institutions, and observing devoutly its sacred rites. Consecrated in great mercy to the human race was the holy Sabbath, and it is, unquestionably, one of the most invaluable means for keeping alive in men's bosoms a fear of God, and a sense of their relations and duties to Him and to each other. The Redeemer, too, hath instituted His Church, and established the divers orders of ministry in it, not only for "the perfecting of the saints^m," but for "the gathering together in one"ⁿ the offspring of God. The ordinances also of the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are admirably adapted to preserve its peculiar doctrines in remembrance and respect, and to manifest the purity, simplicity, and holiness of the services, which it requires. These institutions are as banners, which our Saviour hath furnished for His Church, and around them His friends should be found, if they would magnify His name, and promote the respectability of His religion.

Again. You may contribute to the safety and honour of the ark of God, by instructing your offspring in its origin, its value, and its uses, and

¹ Heb. xiii. 13.

^m Eph. iv. 12.

ⁿ Ibid. i. 10.

training them up to respect and defend it. Shortly you must leave this scene, and with the rest of your possessions leave the religion of your fathers to your posterity. Solemn and affecting is this consideration! It is the best gift of Heaven to our world, and its welfare in succeeding generations may, in some degree, depend upon you. Great therefore, is your obligation, to enlist your offspring under its banners; for if they be brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord^o,” there is a reasonable probability, that their lives will hereafter be its encomium, and their principles its defence.

Further. We may contribute to the success of Christianity, by thwarting the course of its adversaries, and counteracting the poisons prepared against it. There are books, the vehicles of impious sophistry, of debased wit, and of blasphemous philosophy. From the contagion which these diffuse, the good man will endeavour to preserve his household, and to suppress their reputation and influence. There are men of ruinous opinions upon man’s nature, duties, and destiny, whom he will feel it his duty to discountenance, as equally unworthy of public trust, and private approbation. There are friendships with the vicious and profane, fatal as a firebrand taken into the bosom. From these he will withhold himself, and endeavour to preserve those whom God has placed under his guardianship and authority. Unwilling to have the distinctions between right and wrong, between virtue and vice, between the commandments of God and the opinions of men, obliterated; he will reprobate irreligion in whatever character or form it appears: remembering the declaration of the Divine Mediator

^o Eph. vi. 4.

between God and men, “He that is not with Me is against Me^p.”

Once more. By his personal exertions for the advancement of those arrangements which are necessary, to give stability and respectability to the institutions of religion in any place, every Christian may promote the honour and influence of Christianity among men. It is necessary to the success of the Gospel, that its rites be celebrated, its truths preached, and its professors assembled together, to recognize often in social worship their relation to the Head of the Church, and to each other. Where these things are neglected, pure and efficacious religion must decline. Its substance will be gone, and, if any thing of it be retained, it will be only the shadow. But to give to these means of religious proficiency a constant and respectable being, there is requisite good counsel, pecuniary aid, and personal exertions. Not to the ministers of religion alone belongs this care. In the nature of it, it may, and should be shared by all the members of the community. And the good man, who is anxious for the ark of God, will not feel his conscience discharged of one of its most weighty obligations, till he has done whatever he can, towards the complete establishment of the public services of the Church, in the place where the Most High has placed his residence*. The sublime spirit will animate him, which David felt when he resolved, “I will not come within the tabernacle of mine house, nor climb up into my bed; I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep, nor mine eyelids to slumber; neither the temples of my head to take any rest: until I find out a place

^p Matt. xii. 30.

* This discourse was preached in some of the vacant parishes.

for the temple of the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob^a.”

Finally. It is above all to be observed, that every Christian may promote the honour of his religion, by exhibiting to the world in its purity and integrity, the lustre of a Christian life. Powerful is the charm of piety, of benevolence, of meekness, of equity, like that which the Gospel requires. Seen in the lives of men, the spirit and virtues of Christianity form one of its highest commendations. On account of the force of a pure Christian example, in commending the path of religion to men, its blessed Author left to His followers the impressive injunction, to “let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven^r.”

^a Ps. cxxxii. 3—5.

^r Matt. v. 16.

SERMON LXXXV.

ON FAMILY WORSHIP.

JOB i. 5.

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

OF the person here spoken of it is recorded, by the Spirit of God, that he was “ a perfect man ^a.” And in nothing which we know of him, is his excellence more interesting, than in the picture of it which these words exhibit. “ There were born unto Job, seven sons and three daughters ^b.” It is in the height of prosperity and happiness, that he and his family, in the beginning of this book, are presented to our view. They lived in the enjoyment of the delights of life; happy in their abundance, and blessed with a felicity of domestic intercourse, which has rarely, if ever, been exceeded. “ And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them ^c.” It is in the midst of this cheerful and prosperous life, that the father of the family recol-

^a Job ii. 3.

^b Ibid. i. 2.

^c Ibid. ver. 4.

lects their dependence upon God, for all their blessings, and that in the lapse of the day his children may have sinned; and assembling them together, presents them before God, to supplicate in proper acts of devotion forgiveness, and a continuance of His mercies. "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually." And is there a parent, who has not reason every evening, to fear that his children may have sinned? Is there a household who have not occasion, every morning, to acknowledge, and to seek the mercy of God? Picture to yourselves this holy man, gathering stately his family around him, to sanctify them with devotion, and engage them with himself in offering homage and adoration to their gracious benefactor: and you may wonder, that Family Worship, so interesting, so lovely, is so generally neglected. Picture to yourselves the pleasures and the benefits, which must have redounded to this household, from this pious care of their head, and you may wonder, that every parent does not do thus; that he does not thus do, "continually."

I have brought this picture to your notice, brethren, to engage your attention to a discourse upon Family Worship: a business which is too certainly neglected among us, more than it ought to be; and with the performance of which are undoubtedly connected peculiar, and very great advantages. Were that attention to it restored, which has been a prominent feature in the character of every pious age, and pious people, it would strengthen your

Church, and bless your families: and you would have a larger experience of the peace which they have, who love God's law^d. It is in the desire, and I would I could say, the hope of this, that I would set before you some of the considerations, which recommend Family Worship to your observance: and offer to you some directions for the most pleasant and useful performance of it.

I am first to set before you, considerations which recommend Family Worship: and these shall be drawn from its respect to the Deity; from its effect upon families in their collective capacity; and from its uses to individuals who compose them.

With respect to the Deity, it is due to Him, and it is pleasant to Him. Man is to worship his Maker in all the capacities and relations in which his Maker places him. As an individual he offers to Him his private devotions. Communities, as such, bring to Him in public worship their gratitude and their prayers. And families living under the same roof, affected by the sins, interested in the wants, and blessed in the felicities of each other, owe a family sacrifice to the God of mercy, and Giver of their common safety and joys. If any where Almighty God may come, expecting justly a social homage from His children, it is to our houses in the morning: when, while the shades of night encompassed our dwellings, and our strength and powers were lost in the helplessness of sleep, we have been protected by Him, and refreshed amidst we know not how many unseen dangers, and have risen;—while many have sunk into that dread sleep, from which they shall not awake till the heavens are no more;—have risen in safety to the light and beauties, the

^d Ps. cxix. 165.

hopes and joys of a new day. If any where Almighty God may come, expecting justly a joint expression of gratitude, and social supplications from His children, it is to our houses in the evening: when we have been fed together by His hand at our meals, and conducted by His providence through the exposures of the day; (while many come not to their house any more;) are gathered again in health to the sweet pleasures of home, and are about to resign in the arms of unavoidable slumber all power amidst the dangers of night, to protect or help ourselves or each other. Surely, it is strange, that to the guest who tarrieth but a night, families should be anxious to offer, morning and evening, the salutations of courteousness, and suffer the God who is with them, to greet them when they rise, and bless them when they retire, without receiving from them any expression of regard!

Will it be said, God has no need of such service? We have every reason to believe, that this duty is peculiarly pleasant and acceptable to Him. It was from Abraham He resolved He would not hide any thing He would do, because He knew the Patriarch, that He “ would command his children and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord^e.” It was Joshua, highly favoured of the Lord, who has transmitted to posterity the celebrated resolution, “ As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord^f.” It was to Noah, when he had gathered his family by an altar, to offer a sacrifice after their preservation from the flood, that He gave the bow to be a token of a covenant of mercy between Him and them, placing it upon the clouds which covered them. Cornelius, the first of the

^e Gen. xviii. 19.

^f Josh. xxiv. 15.

Gentiles to whom was given salvation through Jesus Christ, was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, praying to God always.” And it was of him, whom we see in the text, gathering his family stately to acts of Family Worship, that the Almighty said to the malignant accuser of the human race, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil^h?” His pleasure in this duty hath indeed been generally manifested towards those who perform it. “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the justⁱ.” And surely they cannot be called just, who withhold from the chief claimant, that which upon every principle is His due.

But our heavenly Father hath not left our duty to Him unconnected with benefit to ourselves. Let us proceed to consider the effects of Family Worship upon the families, in which it is performed. It is favourable to good order. The very recurrence of joint attention, at stated times, to a business of serious character, is calculated to give a character of regularity to a household: and when in the performance of that business all are brought at the beginning, and close of the day, into the presence of God, it may be expected, that this will be promotive of that fidelity in all, in the discharge of their respective duties, by means of which the prosperity and happiness of a family are most effectually secured.

It is calculated to promote and preserve amity, and kind offices in a family. The oftener mankind are brought together before their common Parent,

^g Acts x. 2.

^h Job i. 8.

ⁱ Prov. iii. 33.

the fonder, and more tender they will be of each other: and the spirit which is imbibed by a joint communion with Him, is a spirit of love, and good will to one another. Would not the anger of the father towards the son be mitigated? would not the asperity of the brother towards the brother be softened? would not the sullenness of the servant towards his master be corrected, if all were brought every morning and evening into the presence of God, to confess their sins, and recognise before Him in the spirit of humility and love, their duties to Him and to one another?

But it would also benefit families, by bringing upon them the blessing of Heaven. Great efficacy is ascribed to prayer, in the sacred volume; especially to the prayers of "two or three"^k associated for the purpose. How largely then, may the dews of Heaven be expected to descend upon the families, in which prayer is made unto Him constantly and with one accord, and He is daily praised! "The voice of joy and health," says the Psalmist, "is in the dwellings of the righteous!"^l And it is strikingly observed by the pious Bishop Wilson, that 'ignorance, profaneness, and a curse, must of necessity be in that family, where not a creature but is taken care of; not a swine but shall be served twice a day, and God only is forgotten!'

But this duty will appear still more important and beneficial, if we advert to its uses to the individuals, of whom families are generally composed. And first, with regard to the pious part of them, it affords, next to the worship of the sanctuary, the most convenient and unexceptionable opportunity for that sociality in devotion, which minds seriously

^k Matt. xviii. 20.

^l Ps. cxviii. 15.

impressed do very naturally and strongly desire. Some seek this opportunity in conferences; and some in special meetings for prayer. But it may be questioned, whether the good effects of these upon the community or individuals, would be equal to the effects of a performance, in every house, of family prayers.

But you will say, all the members of the family are not religious. For those who are otherwise, family prayer may have the most beneficial operation. You have a son, his religious principles are not settled; he has been abroad amidst the gaieties and vices of this evil world. It may be, he "hath sinned, and cursed God in his heart." How important, how interesting, that you offer sacrifices for him, to the Lord your God. Are there any in your house, yet uninstructed in religion; any, who are volatile in their minds; any, who have unhappy dispositions, or evil propensities in their hearts or lives? The constant performance of this duty is calculated to diffuse among them religious principles and feelings; to check inordinate volatility, and produce becoming seriousness; and by its gentle influence to correct the bad dispositions, and restrain the conduct of the wicked, and the unhappy. While its tendency is to render the parent considerate, and the child dutiful, to promote the unity of the husband and wife; to make masters kind, and servants sober and faithful, it promises also a more distant good. The individual who has grown up in the habit of family worship, will be most likely, when he himself has a household, to establish this practice in the midst of them: and thus, this duty would be the means of transmitting to posterity the blessings of religion. It may be, that upon some in the ungovernable years of life, the efficacy of

Family Worship may not be immediately perceived : but when the gay season has elapsed, the passions have cooled, and the weeds of corrupt nature have withered with the season that produced them ; the influence of the scenes by the domestic altar will remain ; and the principles and feelings which were there hallowed will be recollected and cherished, like the counsels of the paternal lip, when the inclinations and practices which thwarted them will be remembered with regret.

This duty may be recommended, in the last place, by a consideration drawn from its influence upon the community at large. We are told, that “ the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him ^m.” Were these encampments of the hosts of God multiplied in a land ; did companies of angels surround every habitation, by reason of the altar and piety therein : what a force would they constitute against the approach of evil ! what powerful protectors of health, and peace, and joy ! Let every private home be a temple ; from every dwelling let there arise incense to heaven, morning and evening ; and of the happiness of that people, who have “ the Lord for their God ⁿ,” our country would largely partake. These daily sacrifices would be returned to us by Him, to whom they were offered, that we might feast upon them, and live by them : and they would be means of bringing not only upon the individual, not only upon the family, but also upon the community, a participation of all the fruits of that great sacrifice, “ which taketh away the sin of the world ^o.”

My Christian friends, you see how weighty, how affecting are the considerations, that recommend

^m Ps. xxxiv. 7.

ⁿ Ibid. cxliv. 15.

^o John i. 29.

Family Worship. Forgive me that I have said so much upon this neglected duty. Is it good, is it right, is it useful? What remains but to resolve that a duty which is so good, and useful, you will immediately begin to perform.

In performing it, allow me to recommend that a form of prayer be used, as best calculated for all the purposes of social worship. You have in the Prayer Book a form at hand; and if variety be wished, by selecting from that Book the Collects for repentance, and faith, and charity, for grace and peace, the prayer for all conditions of men, and the thanksgiving, with the Lord's Prayer, you may furnish yourselves with sacrifices, with which the members of your families are familiarly acquainted, and they with you will easily offer them together.

SERMON LXXXVI.

—◆—
ON THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.
—◆—

ST. LUKE, x. 42.

But one thing is needful.

WHEN we consider the various ways, and numerous objects in which men seek felicity, it hardly seems conceivable, that all which is necessary to the true end, and happiness of life, is to be found in one definite pursuit. To do what shall become our nature, secure our interests, and please our God; to attain what shall answer the true purpose of our creation, and yield us peace and permanent satisfaction,—these are momentous concerns: and surely the truth is surprising, and little regarded, that in one single point they all concentrate, that on one distinct object they all depend. Yet this truth is declared by the great Founder of our faith; and we have the record of His declaration, in the passage which I have selected for my text, “But one thing is needful.”

Permit me, my brethren, to invite your attention to the occasion and import of these words; and to the instructive lessons conveyed in the narrative of which they are an interesting part.

There dwelt at Bethany a very amiable family,

whose virtues attracted to them the fondness, and frequent visits of our blessed Lord. “ Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus ^a.” In the society of this affectionate and benevolent family, He loved to pass an hour of retirement: and to their honest minds unfolded the overtures of salvation, which He brought from Heaven, and the bright prospects of eternal life and joy. It happened during one of His visits to them, that the different characters of the sisters were strikingly displayed. In Martha, the elder, we behold a busy, generous, careful person, who was filled with anxieties about the affairs of the household; and on this occasion was entirely absorbed in making preparations for the hospitable entertainment of her guests. In Mary we discover an even, contemplative, docile mind, which wished for no other gratification than to sit at the feet of the celestial Instructor, and hear His words. They were both pious and virtuous persons; both happy in the friendship, and presence of their Saviour; and each of their characters had undoubtedly its peculiar excellence. But the solicitude of Martha’s disposition made her often the prey of unnecessary restlessness and care; it rendered the object too, on which she was intent, however commendable in itself, painful to her friends, by reason of the trouble it occasioned her: and it was this uneasy, immoderate anxiety about things vain and transitory, that our Saviour reprehended. Filled with concern about the entertainment of her guest; busily absorbed in the desire richly to refresh, and handsomely to serve Him, she complained to Jesus of Mary’s abiding at His feet, and neglecting to take part in doing to Him the honours of the house. “ Lord, dost Thou not care

^a John xi. 5.

that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me^b." To Him who lightly regarded the pleasures of the senses, who knew how to value the ceremonious complaisance of the world, and who found His best gratification in leading the docile mind to truth, and to goodness: this was an ill-judged compliment, and occasioned a tender reproof. "Martha, Martha," said He, with affectionate earnestness repeating the name, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her^c."

"But one thing is needful." A serious, impressive declaration! And we hasten from the occasion of it, to consider its import. Evidently our Saviour asserts, that there is "one thing," essential to the end and welfare of every man's life; upon which he should bestow his chief solicitude; in which he should seek his proper happiness. What is this thing, this all important object? Let us look among the many things, about which men "are careful and troubled;" and see if we can find it among them.

In one path of human life, we observe many assembled, who are all anxious to gain the eminences of power, or to attract the notice of fame by the way. They strive amidst difficulties, competitions, and foes: and some few obtain the object of the struggle. But is this the object to which our Saviour points? Is the gratification of ambition the "one thing needful?" By the constitution of things, distinction can be the lot of but few; and therefore could never have appeared to the Divine mind, necessary to all. Besides, how uncertain is the fate

^b Luke x. 40.

^c Ibid. x. 41, 42.

of the ambitious! ‘One Cæsar lives, a thousand are forgot.’ How unsatisfactory are his delights! The insignia of power dazzle the proud eye; the notes of fame’s trumpet feed the vain ear: but neither satisfy the heart. At best, how short is the use of his pomp to the powerful, or of his name to the renowned! Read this in the dust of the great of former times, the memory of whose eminence serves only to enforce, with a pathos that melts and humbles us, the sacred admonition, “Let not the mighty man glory in his might^d.” Great benefit undoubtedly accrues to society from the gradation of its members: and for the general good there must be some elevated to lofty stations. But they who in these eminences seek their chief felicity, pursue a bubble, lustrous indeed, and of rich colours when first blown, but thin as air; dependent on the ever variable wind; and oft-times bursting and vanishing, without leaving a fragment, or trace of what it once was. And to beings formed for high behests, capacitated for real and lasting joys, can such a bubble be the “one thing needful?”

Turn we then to another path of human life. Here in a broad and lively road, are multitudes thronging after pleasure. She holds out to them a sparkling cup; she opens before them gardens of delight: and they follow her under the action of her fascinating spells, fondly flattering themselves, that they have found all that is necessary to the true end, and happiness of life. But alas! they drink of her cup, become intoxicated, and forget their nature, their powers, and their destination. They relax in her gardens; and from innumerable coverts, vexations and miseries surprise them. They are hurried by age or calamity from their sports and joys; and in

^d Jer. ix. 23.

their retreat carry but an empty cup, or bitter, bitter dregs. Is it then the chief business of life, to gratify our senses, to take our ease, and to roll on in pleasure's varying whirl? Is the "One thing needful" that thoughtless gaiety, in the midst of which the heart is sorrowful; or that prodigal mirth, whose end is heaviness? Surely that which shall be worthy of our nature, and satisfy our desires, must be pure, substantial, and permanent; qualities which the boons of temporal pleasure do none of them possess.

But there is another path, narrow, steep, and retired, in which the travellers have a more composed aspect. This is the path of science. Knowledge is the object of those who frequent it; and for their object, though silently, they laboriously toil. For them the morn diffuses its earliest beams; and the midnight lamp sheds its expiring rays. With arduous application, they pursue truth in its deep recesses; and to the attainment of it devote their time and labour, their talents, and all their care. But is this the path to which our Saviour points? Is the object they are seeking, the "one thing needful?" Useful indeed to mankind, and delightful to themselves, are the occupations of the studious. Much, ye sons of science, are we indebted to you, for the exaltation which ye have given to our nature, and the conveniences, refinements, and elevated delights with which your labours have enriched life. But human knowledge neither does, nor can set open a fountain in which man may wash from sin and uncleanness: nor hold out a lamp, by which he may be cheered as he journeys to the tomb, and conduct his steps in safety and peace. Without these wisdom is vain; and understanding but an increase of sorrow. As the chief good of life, even science cannot maintain its strong pretensions to our regard. They who long and assiduously pursue it,

how little do they know; and even this little knowledge which they have in part, it shall vanish away. Nor can the wisdom, which they have acquired with the utmost diligence, defend them from the calamities of their nature, nor discharge the awful debt with which it is encumbered. “There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool.”

From these several paths, we turn to one of more general resort. It is wide and crowded; and from the zeal and industry of those, whom we behold in its different parts, it would be natural to conclude, that here has unquestionably been found the essential business and happiness of life. The object of pursuit here is wealth. By an uncontrollable monopoly, this engages the attention and labour of the greatest part of mankind: and not Martha herself in all the hurry and anxiety of her nature, is more “careful and troubled^f” about entertaining her Redeemer, than the votaries of fortune about the success of their schemes, and increase of their property. Are riches then the “one thing needful?” It would be foolish, and false, to assert that riches, honestly acquired, are not a blessing to virtuous characters. But their claim to the chief desire, and first pursuit of men, must be tried by their sufficiency to procure happiness, their power to ward off the calamities of life, and their stability, or permanence. If in these points they be deficient, they cannot be the proper objects of man’s chief regard. Now can wealth give regularity, contentment, and peace to the bosom, or bring to the soul pardon, purity, and the hope of eternal life? Can it keep

at a distance adversity, or vexation, or sorrow, or death? Can it promise its possessor to remain with him a day, and will it accompany him for his service, in the future states of his existence? In the bright mid-day of abundance, a cloud may arise to darken his prospects; or a little root of bitterness in his bosom may blight all his joys. He may grow indifferent to the gratifications which wealth procures, as soon as he is accustomed to them: and in the mansion of splendour, upon the bed of down, may pine a wretch, and die accursed. What then are the claims of this infatuating object, about the possession of which, mankind in general are so "careful and troubled?" That certainly cannot be the "one thing needful," which a man may possess, and be at the same time, miserable and worthless.

But if in the paths of ambition, pleasure, science, and wealth, which contain the principal objects of human pursuit, the "one thing needful" may not be found, what and where is the great object to which our Lord alludes? We have his own comment upon His declaration, which will at once lead us to the true import of the words. "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." The part she had chosen was to hearken unto Christ; and to learn of Him how to regulate properly her present life, and secure to herself a resurrection from the grave to future and endless felicity. To this she gave her principal care. This was her commended choice. And from the connection of her praise with the text we may safely conclude, that religion, or an attention to the means of passing life here conformably with the will of our Creator, and of securing His favour and an entrance into His heavenly kingdom, is the great thing to which our

Saviour points, as the most interesting concern of every sojourner upon earth, and source of his proper happiness.

The necessity, and pre-eminent importance of this object will be evident, if we consider to what it relates; how great the interest it involves. It respects the soul, the better and immortal part of man; it respects its happiness for eternity. What words can express the magnitude and weight of this consideration? Is it indeed true, my hearers, that these bodies are inhabited by spirits of divine origin, by which we think, and feel, and are raised to our high station in the scale of being? Is it indeed true, that these spirits do not die, but are destined to exist for ever? Is it indeed true, that after these bodies shall have slept their sleep, these spirits in reunion each with its own, "shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; of damnation?" These things the spirit within us suggests, and the revelation which God hath been graciously pleased to give us, most certainly declares. What then can have such claim to our first attention, or be so absolutely needful to our safety and peace, as the things which involve our faith and duty here, and our happiness for ever? What compared with these interests of the soul, are all the concerns of this fleeting existence? The acquisitions and pleasures of life shall presently have an end. This globe itself shall be dissolved. The fires of yon sun shall be extinguished; "and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll^h," and pass away. But the soul shall survive them all; and its happiness for ages without end depends upon the principles we embrace, and the course we pursue.

^g John v. 29.

^h Is. xxxiv. 4.

What then can ambition, pleasure, science, or wealth produce in competition with objects, whose value can be measured only by our love of happiness, and the extent of their importance by the duration of eternity?

Again. An attention to the means of living rightly here, and being raised from death to pardon and eternal life, is pre-eminently needful, because without it no man can be uniformly and permanently happy. Strike from the human mind all that religion unfolds and enjoins, and man would wander through life, like an anxious traveller in an unknown wild; would yield to adversity, like the upturned tree to the blast; would laugh in his vices, like the madman in his chains; and at death would appear to sink like the brute into utter extinction. But with his inquisitiveness, to be perplexed about his very being; amidst the troubles and calamities of life, to have no shelter nor prop; with his nature capable of glorious moral attainments, to be enslaved to vice; and with his longing after immortality, to die without comfort or hope; what situation can be more incompatible with happiness? He must sigh over his condition, whenever it presents itself to his considerate view. Dissatisfaction, if not wretchedness, must oppress his spirit, in whatever path he pursues his unmeaning way. To guide his steps, to soothe his sorrows, to dispel his fears, and to unbar to him the portals of heaven, is exclusively Religion's office: and for this office, as she descends in the mild form of the Gospel, she is divinely consecrated, and adequately endowed. Let but her truths be studied, and life is no longer an inexplicable maze. Let her consolations be used, and the weary spirit, fainting under the tribulations and perplexities of its pilgrimage, is refreshed. Let her guidance be followed, and the soul recovers the image of its Creator, and

with it the consciousness of His peace and favour. Let her promises be believed, and immortality, like the reflecting beams of a sun beyond the horizon, gilds with mild grandeur life's evening clouds, and beautifies the approach of night.

I will only add, that this care of our spiritual and eternal interests is important before all things, because it is this to which all the dispensations of God have reference, and in which alone His gracious will concerning us can be accomplished. For what, before the foundation of the world, was Jehovah employed in devising the scheme of government, which He would administer over our race? For what are the wonders of visible nature displayed to our view, and we furnished with powers and incitements to look through them to their God? For what, "at sundry times and in divers manners hath the Almighty spoken in times past unto the fathers by the Prophets, and in these last days unto us by His Son¹?" For what hath His hand been discerned in all ages, conducting the motions of a stupendous apparatus, which introduces and explains a revelation, to which with the voice of parental anxiety, He summons the attention of the children of men? For what hath the Son of God been incarnate, and crucified, and raised from the dead, and set forth as the Lord of the dead and the living? For what hath His Gospel been promulgated to the world, and His Church instituted, and furnished by Him with a ministry, and ordinances, and holy Sabbaths? For what are we called to the knowledge of God's grace, and faith in Him, and put in possession of the oracles of truth? For what are His dispensations to us individually intended, in the various forms which He sees fit to give them? For what especially are afflic-

¹ Heb. i. 1, 2.

tions and sorrows allotted us, and our lives embittered with chastisements from our Father's hand? All, all hath reference to our salvation, and spiritual improvement. The righteousness, and everlasting happiness of men are the ends which the gracious and mysterious economy of God towards this world, is designed to promote. The general and stupendous acts of His government, and the particular events which His providence ordains, are all intended to manifest the "one thing needful," and to excite and enable us to make it sure. And surely that about which the Almighty God hath vouchsafed thus to interest Himself, that upon which He hath bestowed His counsels and care, and to which He in so many ways presses our attention, must be the chief and all-important concern of our being. If our business, interest, and happiness are to be considered as intimated by the purposes of God, our principal care should be to place ourselves at the feet of His Son Jesus Christ, that we may learn to live according to the Divine will, while we sojourn here, and make our election to eternal life sure.

And now, are there any hearing me, who like Martha suffer the business and cares of this life to absorb their attention? Let them share with her the Redeemer's reproof. Let them learn from Him, that to be "careful and troubled^k" about many of the concerns of this transitory state, is to create to themselves unnecessary uneasiness; perhaps too at the expense of better objects, and durable joys. Let them observe His finger pointing them with unspeakable affection to His salvation, as the "one thing needful;" and ponder His intimation, that having this, they will possess all things. Sufficient for their solicitude is the care of their souls: and a

^k Luke x, 41.

knowledge that they are safe, through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, can alone give peace and satisfaction to their bosoms.

To those, and I doubt not there are many such here present, who like Mary have chosen it as the object of their first desire, to be taught of Christ, and to be sincere, and without offence unto the day of His coming; what confirmation is the Scripture we have been contemplating, calculated to afford. Let it encourage you, Christians, in your cause. It is a "good part" you have chosen; good in itself, good in its influence upon life, good in the estimation of the most High God, your Creator, and good in consequences of infinite and eternal importance. While perishableness is written upon every earthly object; and calamity, and time, and death take away the things, on which others rely; the part you have chosen the Almighty is engaged to uphold; and the declaration of His voice to the meek and constant, the devout and docile Jewess, is a pledge also to you, that it shall never be taken away from you.

SERMON LXXXVII.

—◆—
ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD.
—◆—

ST. LUKE, xiii. 18, 19.

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

THE kingdom of God is an expression of various significations in the sacred volume. Sometimes is meant by it, the universal dominion of the Deity; sometimes the final blessedness to which the saints are heirs; and in a more confined sense it frequently signifies, the Gospel state, or Church of Christ. In this last sense, it is used in the text: and the thing signified is illustrated by a comparison, remarkable for that aptness and beauty, with which all our Saviour's parables are distinguished. "Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." This parable is worthy of our attentive consideration. The illustration of it may instruct, and the inferences from it may confirm us in that faith, which to have received is

our greatest privilege, and to retain which is eternal life.

We are first led by the resemblance, to which our Saviour likens His kingdom, to remark the smallness of Christianity in its beginning. Seeking for the symbol with careful consideration, He chooses one, proverbial among the Jews for littleness, the smallest object possessed of life and expansive force. Small as is the symbol, it is not smaller than the thing it was designed to represent. An obscure prophecy was the first germ of Christianity, and its only label, a simple rite: the prophecy—God's promise to the woman, and sacrifice—the rite. We are not to look for the mustard seed in the appearance of Christ, nor in the paucity and poverty of the first Apostles. Christianity boasts a greater age. Tracing it only to the visible ministry of Christ, some have greatly erred: and very many sceptics, more especially the ingenious, yet subtle Volney, have supported upon the error, the dangerous small arms with which they have assaulted our holy religion. They have adduced the notions, mysteries, and rites, of more ancient ages and different nations; and have represented these, as the elements which imposture borrowed of antiquity, and wrought into a cunning fable, which passes in the world for revelation. Whereas these very notions, mysteries, and rites are nothing more than faint imitations, or distorted parts of the stupendous apparatus, which, from the fall of man, was put in operation to effect his recovery, and introduce "the kingdom of God." Christianity is older than they all. They owe their origin to corruptions of the promises, types and symbols, which prepared the way of the Messiah: and not one of them, perhaps, that has any majesty or significance, would ever have existed, but for the redemption wrought for us from the remotest age, and unfolded

in the Gospel. As soon as justice took cognizance of man's transgression, mercy promised the Deliverer: and it was then, the "mustard seed" was cast into the garden, the seed of Messiah's kingdom sown. From that solemn period we date, from that dark promise we trace, the rise and progress of "the things which belong unto our peace^a." Little in its beginning as was this obscure hint, its expansive force was soon exerted. The rite of sacrifice soon succeeded. In that, in the separation of the "peculiar people^b," in their institutions, the shadows of good things to come; the seed lay concealed, and swelling, and ready to burst into humble, yet perpetual life. They, therefore, have rudely mistaken their cause, who would derive our religion from the "beggarly elements"^c of heathen antiquities. Though exceedingly small, enough so, to be as unobserved as the "mustard seed" sown in the ground, its beginning was before the posterities of Adam. We have ever to bless our God that as early as death laid claim to our race, the seed, whose fruit is to nourish us into immortality, was sown by His hand; and in due season, made to spring up into lively appearance, before an expecting and wondering world.

This brings me to remark, from the image which Christ furnishes in the text of "the kingdom of God," its progressive character. Already we have noticed its gradual expansion in types and prophecies, till it burst into life. In the visible ministry of the Messiah, and promulgation of the Gospel, it assumed its definite appearance. This took place under the most unfavourable circumstances. The soil in which it appeared was incongruous with its nature, and the clime inclement. In its genuine state Christianity had to withstand many a blast; to endure both

^a Luke xix. 42.

^b Deut. xiv. 2.

^c Gal. iv. 9.

chilling cold, and scorching heat ; to encounter every thing which could threaten to check its growth, and crush it in the dust. But it was a plant of an inherent vigour, which no climate could kill, nor rudeness impair : and, under the fostering care of Him who rules all seasons, and disposes all events, it grew daily, it rose in height, and spread the wonder of the world ; it became established. Even the most unfavourable circumstances were made to contribute to its increase. Persecution lopped off its goodliest boughs ; but this gave strength to the body, and the more it was curtailed of its branches, the more did it thrive. Corruption caused its fairest blossoms to fade and decay. But under an all-wise Providence, they fell at its root, and nourished the life, which they had left. At length, the supernatural props which had supported and guided its earliest growth, became unnecessary. It needed no longer the aid of miraculous powers, and they were removed. “ Kings became its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers ^d.” Protected by its holy, lovely form ; supported by its intrinsic excellence ; cultivated assiduously by faith and zeal ; and blessed with the kindest influences of Heaven, it has exhibited a growth, and acquired a greatness, unparalleled, in its particular circumstances, in the annals of the world ; and has, or has had, a name and a praise in most of the nations of the earth. During this progressive state, it has indeed been injured much, and at various periods, by unfriendly gales, and the hands of ignorant or depraved cultivators. In our own age it has experienced terrible shocks. Corruption’s worms have fattened on its trunk ; and infidelity, with its most destructive winds, has attempted to overturn it, or to blast its beauty. But goodly, like

^d Is. xlix. 23.

the young cedar of Lebanon, it resists the worm, and thrives; firm, like the oak upon the mountain's side, it stands inspiring awe, and scarcely gives the tremulousness of its leaves to the conflicting gales. I stop; and looking back through the long, long period of two thousand years, behold with astonishment a religion,—whose Author was crucified, and its propagators twelve of the most despised of men, whose doctrines were opposed to the dearest tenets and pursuits of the world, and whose only arms and friends under heaven were its truth and its merits,—rising from the smallest seed with such steady growth, withstanding every injury of time and weather, acquiring place, and strength, and magnitude in half the earth; and in those portentous days, when the heavens are overcast with unwonted clouds, and the earth is shaken with a strange convulsion, presenting to the confused “fowls of the air,” the only branches in which they can lodge with composure and safety. “It stands fast for ever and ever; and is done in truth and equity^e.” Verily, it “is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes^f.”

This brings me to observe, that the parable carries us forward to a perfected growth, and triumphant state of the Gospel kingdom. Though now it presents the sure refuge to all people, its branches are not filled; there is room for much further growth, and dread occasion for much pruning. As yet, defiling vines cling to the stately tree, obstructing its spread, and defacing its beauty. As yet, the Jews “look” not “on Him whom they pierced^g,” and to many Gentile tribes, the cross is “foolishness^h.” As yet, there is need to cry to the children of men, “Know the Lordⁱ,” and many of them are fluttering wildly,

^a Ps. cxl. 8.

^f Ps. cxviii. 23.

^g John xix. 37.

^h 1 Cor. i. 23.

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 34.

and wandering into dangers, for want of the places in which they may find rest and shelter. But the figure by which the Church is described, and which has appeared hitherto so apt and exact, apprizes us of a mature, and triumphant state of our Redeemer's kingdom. The plant of the little seed, through its progressive growth, is to attain to a perfect height, and strength, and greatness. It is to become a "great tree;" yea, greater than all the trees that are in the earth. Its root is fixed; and it shall continue to extend its growth, till all the inhabitants of our world rejoice in the shadow of the branches of it.

The Christian religion is composed of such elements; there are in it such principles and arrangements, as suggest of themselves that if it be true, it is designed for universal extension and perpetual duration. From the wisdom of the Divine government, and the analogy of the works of God, we should also infer, that its course would be progressive; and that having advanced under His special blessing to its present state, it will continue to advance, till the vast end to which it is adapted, shall be fully accomplished, and it shall reach the maturity, without which its perfection cannot be developed, nor its utility realized in all its extent. In the view of reason, it is much more probable now, that it shall in the fulness of time become "a great tree," and fill the earth, than it was at its beginning, that it would ever attain to its present height, strength, and greatness.

But it is chiefly from the prophecies and revelations of Scripture, that we derive instruction concerning this interesting truth. They lead us to expect, that in an appointed time, the Gospel will spread itself over the world; and the Church of Christ, purified and extended, become the ark of all nations and people. In dark figures, mysterious symbols, and

sublime predictions, they declare these truths. But indistinct as are the details, enough is evident to assure us, that as “the comparison” wherewith the Saviour “compared” His kingdom ^k has hitherto, through so many centuries, been exactly verified, so it shall at length in the universal extension of the knowledge and blessings of the Gospel, have a complete fulfilment. For the protection, nourishment, and maturity of this tree, which the Most High hath planted, His providence is engaged, and His word pledged. “It shall stretch out its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river^l:” and in its presence every idol grove shall be made to wither, and every plant of error shall be rooted out. “No weapon formed against it shall prosper^m.” It may be shaken, and some of its leaves which harbour corruption, or have lost their verdure, shall fall: but its root is immoveable, and its strength is eternal; and it shall not cease to multiply its branches, till it shall have spread itself “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earthⁿ.”

Fastening our eyes upon the miraculous reservation of the Jews, as a pledge of the completion of these great promises, it is our duty to ponder with attention these gracious purposes of the Most High, and to rejoice with faith and becoming gratitude, in the greatness and glorious destiny of our holy religion. Bearing ever in mind our Saviour’s reply to the too inquisitive Apostles, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power^o;” we should, with reverent humility, check our inquiries where the Almighty hath assigned limits to them; and maintain a stedfast confidence in the wisdom of His arrangements, and the certainty

^k Mark iv. 30.

^l Ps. lxxx. 11.

^m Is. liv. 17.

ⁿ Ps. lxxii. 8.

^o Acts i. 7.

of His word. Appreciating, faithfully, our own privilege and happiness in having been brought 'to the knowledge of His grace, and faith in Him,' we should contribute, by all the means which He hath put in our power, to the extension of His kingdom: and when we offer the petition, which we are taught and commanded to offer daily, that His kingdom may come, we should offer it with the utmost devotion of our souls, both with an eye to the glory of our God, and a generous concern for the instruction and salvation of all our fellow men.

We have now considered the beautiful, and exact resemblance furnished by Christ, of "the Kingdom of God." There are inferences from this subject, of great weight and variety. Let me entreat your patience, while I adduce only a few which are too instructive to be omitted.

The first is, that this is one of those singularly important comparisons, or parables, which are not only illustrative, but prophetic. We are to remember that it was used eighteen hundred years ago, when the Christian Church was as small and feeble, as the germ just starting into life from its seed. Had Jesus Christ been any other than He declared Himself; had He not come from God, He could not have known, that His cause would not be crushed at its birth: and would never have hazarded, upon ground altogether uncertain, a prediction, whose failure must have betrayed His falsehood and defeated His design. The progress of the Gospel thus far, is evidence that its Author had an intuition of the far distant course of events. He spake His parable with the confidence, which His prescience only could have inspired: and the prediction it involves, will appear to the humble and sincere inquirer, as a daily attestation of the truth of the religion, in support of which it was uttered. For who, but one acquainted

with the counsels of the Almighty, would have ventured to pronounce, that the little seed of the Gospel kingdom should become “a great tree,” and fill the earth? Who else, that had thus pronounced, could, under the government of that Being who “heareth not sinners^p,” have had his prediction so wonderfully fulfilled?

Another important inference from what has been said is, that the Gospel is the object of constant providential care. It much favours its claim to be considered as the work of God, that it is analogous in its course to His other operations. There is a method with the Most High. His works are all progressive. There is a gradation of cause and effect in all the operations of His hands. The course of revelation is in striking harmony with this method. As the day gradually rises from its dawn to noonday splendour; as the year gradually unfolds the successive perfections of its seasons; as the plant springs from its seed, and gradually grows to its maturity; as every thing in nature advances to its end by steps of a constant and majestic order:—so Christianity has been progressive; not flashed upon the world with sudden glare, like the transient lightning, but systematically introduced, established, and developed, according to His uniform method, who “worketh all in all^q.” Although it has been made a noisy objection, that this religion was not earlier promulgated, and in resistless manner;—to the reflecting mind the preparation that preceded it, its small beginning, gradual expansion, and steady progress towards its maturity, point to the same deliberate hand, to which we refer the works of creation that surround us.

But more especially the inadequateness of the

John ix. 31.

^q 1 Cor. xii. 6.

means to the effect obliges us, when contemplating the rise and progress of the Gospel, to acknowledge an agency, invisible and Almighty. Survey the venerable oak. As you trace back its astonishing growth to a small acorn, dying in the earth, do you not perceive irresistible evidence of an invisible, and intelligent power, framing in embryo its curious parts, giving it life, conducting its growth, and bringing it to its majestic form and maturity? You surely do. For where, but in the wisdom and power of the Creator, can be found adequate cause of the wonderful process? But look now at the religion of the Gospel. Retrace its progress back to its small origin. Observe how curiously and wonderfully its parts are formed and connected. Behold how, without human aid, it has struggled through every difficulty which could obstruct its growth, or impair its beauty. See it rise; mark its increase; and contemplate the prospect of its unlimited extension. Do this, and say if ye do not perceive, that it must have been from the beginning the work of God; that as the object of your Creator's care, it is of divine origin, and entitled to your reverence and devout regard. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such a thing? The growth of this "tree of life," from the little seed cast in the garden, demands for its explanation the agency of infinite wisdom and power. And by this in the moral, as "by the things that are made," in the natural world, "the invisible things" of Jehovah are "clearly" manifested, "even His eternal power and Godhead^s." So that the unbeliever and the sinner are without excuse.

The last inference I shall make from our Saviour's lively representation of His kingdom is, the encouragement it is calculated to afford to His pious

^r Rev. ii. 7.

^s Rom. i. 20.

disciples, in times unfavourable to Christianity, when the laugh of the scorner, and the delusions of vice prevail. It is in times, when many are offended at His doctrines, that our Saviour has occasion to say to His nearest friends, "Will ye also go away?" It is in the seasons, when the overflowing of ungodliness makes him afraid, that the good man, like Eli, will be on "the way side watching," with "his heart trembling for the ark of God." But when his spirit is sinking within him, and anxiety and perplexity are seizing upon his thoughts, he can repose with consolation upon the Divine assurance, that the plant, which his heavenly Father hath planted, is rooted in the earth by His unalterable decree: that it shall there stand and flourish, in defiance of every worm, and every wind, which may assail it; that storms and tempests shall only serve to free it of its lifeless wood and leaves, and establish it more firmly, with more renowned greatness.

Such, Christians, is the illustration, and such are the inferences of the "comparison," wherewith our blessed Lord hath "compared the kingdom of God*." Upon the whole it appears, that this goodly tree is the hope of our world. Let then the rich befriend it with their fostering aid, as affording the safest shade, beneath which they may enjoy their privileges and blessings. Let the poor gather themselves around it, as yielding the only odours, with which their weary spirits may be refreshed. And let all the good unceasingly ask the dews of Heaven upon it, that reaching, ere long, its promised maturity, its fruit may be for meat, and its "leaves for the healing of the nations y."

* John vi. 67.

* Mark iv. 30.

† 1 Sam. iv. 13.

‡ Rev. xxii. 2.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

ON THE HEALING OF THE BLIND.

ST. LUKE, xviii. 37.

And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

To whom was this told ; and what were the effects of the information ? It was told to one, in whose bodily infirmity there was a figure of our spiritual condition ; and the effects of the information were an image of the deliverance which we may have, through our Redeemer. I ask your attention to this interesting story, that you, “ through patience and comfort ” of this Scripture “ may have hope *.”

We will first attend to the subject of the miracle, which the Gospel records. There are four things concerning him worthy of observation : his condition, a blind beggar : his application for help, under the sense of his blindness, to Jesus of Nazareth, as soon as he heard of Him : his perseverance, notwithstanding the obstacles which were thrown in the way : and his wonderful recovery of his sight.

A blind beggar ! Can a condition be conceived more humble, more helpless, more deplorable ? In a spiritual sense, it is the condition of every sinner. He sees not God ; he sees not salvation ; he sees not

* Rom. xv. 4.

peace. By the fall his understanding is darkened. By reason of the film which his iniquities have spread over his spiritual sight, the light of God's countenance, which shines eternally upon His creatures, is not seen. On the way side of life, he is poor and blind, dependent for guidance upon any one who will undertake to lead him, and for gratification upon the pittance of pleasure which he begs of some passer by, or the tidings which he asks of the traveller concerning vain and temporal things. "I counsel thee," says one who is alone worthy to advise, "I counsel thee to anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see; for thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind^a." So unhappy is the condition of this blind beggar, that when he feels his necessities, he sees not of whom he may ask for help: and when the Saviour passes by, who can restore to him his vision, and satisfy him with bread, through his blindness he asks "what it means^b." And the greatest misfortune is, that he is less anxious to be delivered from his spiritual, than from his bodily wretchedness: a disposition, which is illustrated and reprov'd, in the second thing to be noticed, concerning the beggar on the way to Jericho, namely, his immediate application for help, under the sense of his blindness, to Him who was able to heal him. "They told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me^c." Jesus of Nazareth! His fame was now spread abroad. He was approved amply of God, by signs and wonders which He wrought. This blind beggar had heard that by Him "the blind received their sight, and the lame did walk, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf did hear, the dead were raised up, and the

^a Rev. iii. 15, 17.

^b Luke xviii. 36.

^c Ibid. ver. 37, 38.

poor had the Gospel preached to them^e." Of His character as the Messiah, he had obtained some knowledge, for he addressed Him as the "Son of David." Probably, he had heard of His wonderful compassion; that none who sought of Him deliverance from misery, however poor, or friendless, or wretched, were turned away. Perhaps he recollected, without understanding the spiritual import, that in the days of the "Son of David," the eyes of the blind should be opened^f. At any rate, He who might heal him, was passing by. He would not wait for a better opportunity. He would not stop to calculate the probability of success. Without asserting any claim to His help; yea, with a consciousness that he had nothing to give, in compensation for his cure, he immediately cast himself upon the pity of the Redeemer: he cried, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me^g." And thus should the blind beggar in the spiritual sense seek for deliverance. The fame of Jesus, as the Saviour of sinners, has been spread abroad through all ages. Prophets have proclaimed it. Apostles have declared it. His own miracles of grace have testified it. By raising Him from the dead, God hath also approved Him unto all men, as His "Messenger of the covenant^h" to this lower world, to give salvation to its sinful inhabitants, by the remission of sins. Destitute of the joys and benefits of the light of life, exposed to innumerable perils and privations, poor and friendless, shall sinful men, when this Messiah, who is "mighty to saveⁱ," passes near them, neglect to call upon Him, defer to seek His help? What though they have no claim to His assistance? What though they cannot remunerate His love? He offers

^e Matt. xi. 5.

^f Is. xxix. 18.

^g Luke xviii. 38.

^h Mal. iii. 1.

ⁱ Is. lxiii. 1.

His mercy “without money, and without price^k.” With confidence in the fame they have heard of His Almighty power, and the declarations He hath vouchsafed of His authority, they should stretch out their hands to Him as needy supplicants, and beg the mercy, which is Jehovah’s alms. “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.” They will not cry in vain if they imitate the blind beggar;—

In the third particular to be noticed in him, namely, his perseverance, notwithstanding the obstacles which were thrown in his way. “And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me^l.” Great and innumerable are the difficulties which sinners may have to surmount, in coming to Christ. How shall I, says one, who is poor and naked, mean and despised, look for a place in the Church of the saints, or expect any notice from the ministers of the sacred pools? What, says an uncharitable multitude concerning the ignorant and stupid, the blindest and poorest beggar by the way side, can these expect to attract the attention of the Son of God, and to be made heirs of His covenant, and of the household of the Most High? Hold thy peace, wretched sinner, saith the adversary. Cease from thy prayers, thy hopes, and thy inquiries. Canst *thou* hope for deliverance, whose sins have caused thee to be given up to blindness, who art too wicked to be regarded by God? Thus the world derides; conscience intimidates; the adversary terrifies. But a sense of his dangers and miseries, and confidence in the power and mercy of the Saviour, will render the sinner importunate and persevering in his prayers. The pressure upon him of his miseries and danger, together

^k Is. lv. 1.

^l Luke xviii. 39.

with his apprehension of the power of the Messiah to set him free, will not suffer him to remit his importunity. He will supplicate so much the more earnestly, as God the longer deferreth to deliver him. Like the blind man in the Gospel, whose perseverance is recorded for our instruction, obstacles and delay will add strength to his cries; he will continue to call till Jesus hears him.

The success and happiness of such perseverance, are taught us in the fourth particular we have to notice, concerning the subject of this miracle,—the wonderful recovery of his sight. “And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God ^m.” Who can forbear to picture to himself the joy, which now rushed as a torrent over the blind beggar’s heart? The sun in the heavens he saw with delight and wonder; the face of nature transported him with its beauty and sublimity, and the relations and proportions of all its parts. He gazed upon the fair colours of the flowers, which had refreshed him with a fragrance, that came from objects which he could not behold. He lifted his eyes with admiration to the source of that heat, which had sometimes imparted to his impoverished frame, a genial warmth, with the origin of which and its transcendent glory he was unacquainted. He felt, too, free. He saw the face of man. He walked without a leader. What wonder that he clung to the Being, who had given him such independence, and opened to him such views and hopes? Well might he follow Jesus, “glorifying God ⁿ.” This is but one of many instances, in which our Lord seemed not to hearken to “the prayer of the poor destitute ^o,” till their earnestness had been

^m Luke xviii. 42, 43.

ⁿ Ibid. ver. 43.

^o Ps. cii. 17.

proved, and their faith and perseverance manifested. And as the importunate widow overcame by her continual supplications even the unjust “judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man^p ;” so God will help the needy who “cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them^q.” Nor will their joy and the sources of their happiness be less than the blind man’s, when He turneth Him unto their prayer, and granteth their desire. His reconciled “countenance,” they will behold pleasant and glorious, “as the sun shineth in his strength^r.” Faith, and hope, and charity, and all the objects of the moral world, will be seen in all their beauty and grandeur, their proportions and relations to each other. The source of the good feelings which, while yet they were blind, occasionally warmed their souls ; and the fair complexions of the grace, with whose benevolent deeds they were occasionally refreshed, will be seen. They see man in his true character and destination. They feel their spirits free. They lift up their eyes, and a heaven is seen above, ethereal, unbounded, glorious : and beyond the reach of their spiritual vision, they imagine regions of immortality, where God dwells. To these regions they hope to come. The joys of this immortality, the restoration of their sight is a pledge to them, that they shall one day share. And how shall they forbear to follow Him, to whom they owe this “great salvation^s ?”

From Bartimeus we turn to Jesus of Nazareth ; from the conduct of the blind beggar, to the conduct of the Son of God, who gave him sight. Three things here deserve our consideration—the extent of His benevolence ; His gracious condescension ;

^p Luke xviii. 2.

^q Rev. i. 16.

^r Ibid. ver. 7.

^s Heb. ii. 3.

and His ascription to the blind man's faith of the salvation which he found.

The extent of our Lord's benevolence is worthy of remark. It embraces the whole human race. The rich and honourable counsellor of Arimathea, and the blind beggar on the way from Jericho, are alike observed by Him, and have His regard. In like manner His redemption embraces all mankind. The penitent Magdalene shares it with faithful Abraham. No sinner is so far removed from God, that he may not be brought "nigh by the blood of Christ¹." Poor blind man by the way side, despair not to call upon Jesus, if He come in thy way. He died for thee.

Another thing remarkable in the conduct of our Lord is His gracious condescension. He "stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him: and when he was come near, He asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee²." The Son of God, the heir of all worlds, stops on His way to hearken to the prayer of a blind beggar: He calls him to Him, and enters into an inquiry concerning his wishes and his wants, and this for our instruction:—that when awed by the greatness of our Creator, and overwhelmed by the distance between Him and us, we may be encouraged to call upon Him, and hope in His name. The blind man put confidence in His goodness, and obtained his desire.

It is important also to observe, that the faith of this suppliant procured him his relief. The Scriptures give us no example of any blessing obtained from our Saviour, without this quality. "If thou

¹ Eph. ii. 13.

² Luke xviii. 40—42.

canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth^x." And again, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt^y." And here in the case before us, Jesus said unto him, "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee^z." Awakened sinner; wouldst thou share the mercies, and come unto Him, believing that thy God hath sent Him into the world for thy redemption? Have confidence in His goodness, and the sufficiency of His power to save thee. If there were no other reason why faith should be required of thee, it were a sufficient and an awful one, which St. John hath given, "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son^a."

Brethren, the application of this interesting portion of Scripture is to yourselves. God has placed you, though blind and poor, in the way in which you may hear of His Son the Redeemer. When you hear the voices of the Prophets, and the movements of the types and the sacrifices are set before you, do you ask what it meaneth? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." When the Church calleth you to joy in the Christmas, to keep the Lent fast, to solemnize the Good Friday, to observe the Easter festival, to celebrate the Ascension, do you ask what it meaneth? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." When the altar of God hath upon it its white covering, and there are placed thereupon bread and wine, and the priests stand by it, in deepest humility and highest adoration, do you ask what it meaneth? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Are your desires to go to Him for the salvation you need, restrained by your

^x Mark ix. 23.

^y Luke xviii. 42.

^z Matt. xv. 28.

^a 1 John v. 10, 11.

fears, or the opposition of the enemy, or the cavils of an evil world? “ Rise ; He calleth you ^b.” Are you guilty? He calleth you to pardon. Are you feeble? He calleth you to grace? Are you afflicted? He calleth you to consolation. Are you mortal? He calleth you to eternal life. “ Come unto me,” saith He, “ all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ^c.” Be not deterred then by the difficulties in the way. Lay aside the upper garment of your own sufficiency. It may entangle you in going to Jesus. Think not of your claim to His help. Regard not your inability to compensate Him for your cure. Have faith in His character. Have faith in His pity, and His power. His name is SAVIOUR ^d. Contemplate Him by His name, and cry to Him perseveringly, “ Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me ^e.” He standeth still when the poor calleth ; “ He also will hear their cry, and will help them ^f.”

^b Mark x. 49.

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^d Ibid. i. 21.

^e Luke xviii. 38.

^f Ps. cxlv. 19.

SERMON LXXXIX.*



ON THE RICH AND THE GREAT, BEGGING
THE BODY OF JESUS.



ST. MATTHEW, xxvii. 58.

He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.

THE fate of the body of our blessed Lord, after His crucifixion, is a very interesting part of His history. You have often heard, that it passed from the cross into the hands of Joseph of Arimathea, and by him, being affectionately embalmed with spices, and wrapped in clean linen, was deposited in a sepulchre in his garden. Many a pious Christian has, doubtless, envied this Arimathean his felicity, in possessing the body of his Lord. You all, when reading the narrative, have admired the constancy of his affection, his resolution, and his pious fidelity. But there are circumstances of this transaction, in the reading of which, it may be, the uses they import have not been noticed, nor the instructions they suggest, regarded. About to go up to the table of the Lord, to receive that which He hath left us as His body, these circumstances may be well brought to our recollection, and made subjects of our meditation. They relate to the event we are to commemorate.

* Preached on a Communion Sunday.

They are instructive, some one or other of them, to all.

In the first place, he whom we here find begging “the body of Jesus,” was rich. “There came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple^a.” It is pleasant to find the rich among the disciples of the Lord. To His merits and intercession, they owe whatever good things they enjoy. By their influence in society, and the conspicuousness of their examples, they may render Him the greatest service. And amidst more cares and temptations than others, having more to resist while they live, and more to leave when they die, they have the most need of the guards and consolations of His holy religion. Of the benefits, particularly, which the Lord’s Supper was instituted to convey, they may avail themselves with the greater advantage. No where can the sanctifying influences of His body, be more necessary or useful, than amidst the possessions and dangers of the affluent. Disdain not, ye rich, to beg it at His table. Affluence, with religion, is a blessing from God, and beneficial to the world. But irreligious influence is the greatest ingratitude to the Most High, and pernicious in its influence among men. The good Arimathean, “who himself also was Jesus’ disciple,” was rich.

Further. This person, whose care to obtain the body of Christ has given him an unperishable renown, was in public life. He was an “honourable” man, and a “counsellor^b.” And though “with God there is no respect of persons^c,” yet for men and for themselves it is happy, when public characters are guided by the principles, observe the ordinances, and are adorned with the graces, of religion. They,

^a Matt. xxvii. 57.

^b Mark xv. 43.

^c Rom. ii. 11.

in an especial manner, need her influences to sustain them under the burden of their cares, and preserve them in their numerous liabilities to evil. And it is of great utility to all orders in society, when they who are to rule, or to teach others, are seen submitting themselves obediently to the ordinances of the Almighty. Refrain not, ye who are in stations of trust, or of power, from seeking in the sanctuary of her strength the blessings of religion. Go to her altar, to contemplate and crave "the body of Jesus." Amidst the fears and perils of your place, it will inspire you with strength, and holy hope. Amidst the ingratitude, and querulousness, and slander, to which those who are in public stations are always exposed, it will teach you to bear, and to forgive. It will teach you to persevere, as far as you are able, in "doing good unto all men^d," even to your enemies. It will cleanse your spirits, if, amidst the exposures, and turmoils, and injuries of life, they have been sullied with wrong passions or evil desires. It will give rest to your souls, amidst the fatigues of business, and anxieties of fidelity, by opening to them again and again, that happiness of heaven, of which "the body of Jesus" is the pledge to the faithful. Nor will Religion ever fail to give to those, who seek her in public life, their highest grace. More to be valued is the precious oil of that sanctity, which she sheds upon the heads of her votaries, than any laurels which proclaim their heroism, or bays that crown their wisdom. You see it among princes in the great Alfred. You see it among counsellors in that model of Christian sanctity, Chief Justice Hale. Nor are there wanting among the most estimable of the public officers of our own country, some, who are seen going humble to the altar of God, and "begging the body of Jesus."

^d Gal. vi. 10.

It is believed that, in Christian countries, there are many among the rich, and among those in public stations, who would gladly stand among the disciples of the Redeemer. But they shrink from the opinion of the world; of that world too, which is evil, and whose "friendship is enmity with God^e." We will pass, therefore, to notice, in the third place, the resolution of the faithful Arimathean in the act recorded of him in the text. "He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus." This man was a Jew. His own kindred and nation had caused Christ to be slain. By the people among whom he dwelt, the crucified Jesus was held in derision. Not only contempt and scorn, but persecution and death awaited His followers. But Joseph "was Jesus' disciple^f." The body of his Lord, of his friend, of his Saviour, was not to be lightly regarded, nor timidly neglected, though all men should desert it, but himself. He presses forward to obtain it, through the levity and sarcasms of his neighbours. He presses forward through the scorn of an unbelieving world. It is, indeed, the body of a crucified Man. But it is the crucifixion of that body, which procures the pardon of his sins, and restores him to the favour of God. It is the body of the Being, who hath given Himself for him, through whom alone he, a sinner, hath hope of everlasting life. He thinks not what he shall hazard. He minds not what the wanton and the thoughtless will say of him. To obtain the precious body, he presses forward, even into the presence of Pilate; of that Pilate, who had delivered up Christ as a malefactor, and probably looked upon His followers with pity and contempt, as miserable children of delusion. Even into the presence of Pilate does Joseph press to obtain

^e Jam. iv. 4.

Matt. xxvii. 57

the body of his Lord ; regardless, alike of the inquisition of the Roman governor, and the scorn and derision of elevated life. He “ went in boldly unto Pilate,” says St. Mark, “ and craved the body of Jesus ^g.” Hallowed constancy ! Transcendent resolution of pious affection ! Were a spirit like thine, thou saint of the Most High God, in the hearts of the Christians to whom this body is offered, would they turn their backs, lest a thoughtless and profane world should point at them, as religionists, deluded or insincere ? It is to be feared, that many, particularly among the rich, and the great, and the younger part of the Christian community, are deterred from avowing their respect for Christianity, and its institutions, and especially from going to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, by a regard to the opinion, a fear of the remarks, a subjection to the influence, of the world. But, Christians, is it not the body of your only Saviour which is there offered you ? Is it not the body, without which you could have had no pardon of your sins ? Is it not the body of Him who died for your redemption, and whose blood hath purchased heaven for you ? And can the opinion of the world weigh any thing against your obligation to receive that body ? So long as you neglect to do so, are you not living in an habitual disregard of the commandment of the Lord, and consequently, in habitual sin ?

But it may be said, we are immersed in the business, and the pleasures of life ; we are not in a situation favourable to religion ; how shall we use “ the body of Jesus ?” Ah, this is the error ! As if there were any situation in which religion is not needful for man : as if the Deity had required any thing of all men, which the condition in which He

^g Mark xv. 43.

has placed any one, unfits him to perform! What did Joseph with the body of Jesus when he had obtained it? He took it into his garden. He deposited, he kept it there. And thus should all His disciples do. We all have gardens of our delight; some in the domestic circle; some in the regions of business; some near the walks of ambition, or of science; and some on pleasure's grounds. Wherever they are, we need, while we walk in them, the body of our Lord to remind us of sinfulness and the heinousness of sin; to assure us of pardon and a better life; and to impel us to the love and service of our Creator. And surely the hosts of heaven are where the body of the Lord is; surely it repelleth the evil one, who, at the sight of the blood of the Redeemer, relinquisheth his hold upon his prey; surely where it had been, angels met the beloved disciple, and St. Peter, and the pious woman, with the blissful assurances of the resurrection. It is like the Paschal Lamb. Its blood is the token for preservation to the destroyer. Because of the infatuating attraction, and contaminating influence of business and pleasure, we have reason to go often to the altar of God, to renew our repentance, and our vows; to be sanctified again with the blood of the sacrifice which is upon it; and receive, afresh, the Spirit of grace from on high. Religion does not interfere with any proper business, or innocent pleasure of life. Her ordinances are not arrows to wound, but shields to protect us. Never was the garden of Joseph safer, or pleasanter, than when he had in it, "the body of Jesus." It kept the hosts of heaven near him. One cannot forbear to think that at times, the Spirit of the Lord God walked there.

But this brings me to the last circumstance of this transaction, to which your attention may happily be directed; the reward of Joseph's fidelity. It was

his distinguished felicity, that in his ground death was overcome, and the bars of his prison broken, and everlasting life opened to the human race. Here first was heard the blissful sound, "The Lord is risen^h!" Here first broke forth that light of immortality, which from that day hath brightened every chamber of the tomb. Happy Arimathean! We may not share with him in this felicity. But there is another resurrection: a resurrection from 'the death of sin, unto the life of righteousness.' And when the body of the Redeemer is taken, and wrapped in the clean linen of a pure faith, with the spices of affectionate devotion and obedience, this resurrection is witnessed in the bosom, into which it is received. And who shall speak its joy? It enliveneth life. It giveth "songs in the nightⁱ." Its fruit is present peace and transporting hope, and its end an ascension with the Conqueror of death, the Deliverer of man, to His kingdom in heaven, and everlasting life there. Virtually shall every one, who faithfully receives the body of the Lord, share with Joseph the recompence of his fidelity to his Master and friend; for he, too, shall witness, and "know the power of His resurrection^k."

There have been set before you, my hearers, the striking and instructive circumstances of this part of the history of our Lord. May it lead the rich to be of His disciples, who, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich^l." If any are hearing me, who are in stations of trust or power, may it induce them, amidst the exposures and cares of their situations, to seek, and exhibit the sanctifying influences of religion. May it encourage the young and the fearful, yea, and all the followers of the Lamb, to go to His

^h Matt. xxviii. 6.

ⁱ Job xxxv. 10.

^k Phil. iii. 10.

^l 2 Cor. viii. 9.

altar, without regarding the opinion of an evil world, and with pious affection, “crave the body of Jesus.” And, Christians, when you have received it, take it with you into the gardens of your life. It may be, that its presence will cause some noxious plants to wither. But not a plant of goodly qualities but will flourish more luxuriantly; not a flower of innocent beauty, but will bloom more lovely by “the body of Jesus.” Its presence in the garden will consecrate the ground; and shed an air of solemn majesty and holy stillness, which will remind you of another world. As you advance towards the evening of your day, you will find yourselves, in whatever walk you may be, bending your steps most willingly towards His sepulchre. On death you will muse with most peaceful stillness; and the hope of resurrection will come near your souls, sweeter than the last rays of the departing sun, while you have near you, and contemplate, with the emotions and expectations it is given to produce, “the body of the Lord Jesus.”

S E R M O N X C .



ON THE COVENANTED MERCIES OF GOD.



REVELATION, iv. 3.

And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

To penetrate the vail which separates heaven from our view, and look into its glories, pleasures, and pursuits, is the natural desire of the Christian mind. As the country to which our virtuous friends have, many of them, departed, and to which our hopes and steps are directed by our faith, we cannot help feeling inquisitive about it ; every instruction or description which relates to it, deeply interests our thoughts.

In the beginning of the chapter, from which I have taken my text, St. John enters upon the relation of the most beatific vision of this country, which has been yet vouchsafed to any mortal being. Having had his visual strength perfected by the Spirit of God, “ he looked, and, behold a door was opened in heaven ^a.” The state, and majesty of the Deity, in His high abode ; the attendants of His throne ; their occupations and bliss ; the economy of the celestial world ; its furniture and glories, were unfolded to his sight. And when he sunk, overwhelmed with

^a Rev. iv. 1.

the brightness of the display, an angel attended to strengthen and instruct him.

Among the objects in the glorious prospect, which attracted his admiring view, he tells us in the text, “there was a rainbow round about the throne” of the Eternal, “in sight like unto an emerald.” An object this of singular grandeur and expression. Amidst all the glories of heaven he describes, it may worthily hold our consideration awhile: and to ascertain its significance, and pursue the reflections it suggests, shall be our employment of the passing hour.

Every one will perceive in the rainbow, which St. John describes, an allusion to that beautiful offspring of Divine power and goodness, in the natural world, which bears the same name. This last, when the Flood had executed the just vengeance of the Most High upon an irreclaimable world, was given to the few righteous persons who had been saved in the ark from perishing; as a token to them, and to their posterity for ever, that the waters of a flood should no more destroy the earth. Awful was the destruction they had escaped! Great was the favour which their uprightness in the midst of “a perverse and crooked generation^b,” had secured them! Anxious was their dread Preserver to endear Himself to them, by mitigating their fears, and encouraging their confidence in Him. When, therefore, the resentful waves had subsided, and they had passed in the ark to the Ararat of their safety, mercy triumphing hand in hand with justice, thus addressed them, “I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud.—

^b Deut. xxxii. 5.

And I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth ^c." Such was the consecration of the rainbow, to be to the faithful a token of a covenant of mercy, between God and man, whenever descending showers and a darkened sky recal His former vengeance on the ungodly, or excite terrific apprehensions of His power. Delighting the mind with its mild beauteous brightness, it seems when it appears in the murky cloud, to speak the covenant of which it is the token; to look the mercy, which it was ordained to signify.

There is a harmony between all parts of the universal dominion of God; and from those which are known, emblems and analogies are borrowed, to furnish us with proper conceptions of those, with which we have no natural acquaintance. Great systems and dispensations are dimly represented in small ones: remote and spiritual objects, by those which are more sensible. Thus the flood which once scourged the earth, was typical of the final conflagration, from which shall rise the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ^d." Thus too the preservation of Noah and his family was emblematic of the salvation of the redeemed, in the ark of Christ's Church. And thus the significance of the Rainbow, which surrounds the throne of the Eternal, is shadowed forth in the inferior one, to whose beauty and hallowed use we have just adverted.

We may consider it with respect to Him, whom it surrounds, and with respect to those, by whom it is beheld.

As it respects the Deity, this emblem of mercy qualifies Him, if I may use the expression, to be beheld by those, who are admitted to the joys and

^c Gen. ix. 13, 14, 16.

^d 2 Pet. iii. 13.

honours of His abode, with perfect peace, composure, and delight. The most excellent blessedness of His saints consists in the perpetual vision and fruition of His glory. It is in "His presence, that there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand" only "there is pleasure for evermore^e." But in His full, unqualified glory, to behold Him, would be too much for any created being. In His essential holiness, if He look unto "the moon, it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight^f:" and in the light of His unveiled wisdom, "His angels are chargeable with folly^g." His tremendous power, His transcendent purity, would be insupportable to the most perfect of the "spirits of the just^h," if they were not softened by the mild beams of mercy to their trembling perceptions. But while there is about Him, a lively emblem of His goodness towards them; while He is surrounded by the perpetual token of His covenant of mercy in Christ Jesus, with the children of men; they are not terrified by the greatness of His power, nor by His awful justice: for He stands displayed as their protector and friend, and the garment of His appearance is the pledge of love. Oftentimes the Deity appears severe in His dispensations. Terrible is He in the habiliments of judgment. Therefore to St. John, He who sat upon the throne of heaven, "was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone:" the former, in its unqualified strength, a fit emblem of His omnipotence; the latter, in its fiery redness, expressive of His terrible fierceness in the day of His displeasure. But with the dismaying hue of the jasper and the sardine, are blended the emerald's mild beams. Of that agreeable green, which refreshes and protects the feeble sight, this precious

^e Ps. xvi. 12.

^g Job iv. 18.

^f Job xxv. 5.

^h Heb. xii. 23.

stone was chosen to represent to us that tender mercy towards His children, which envelopes all the perfections of the Most High. To them every affliction is tempered with mercy. Though “clouds and darkness are round about Himⁱ,” and His dispensations, sometimes, fill His most faithful servants with dismay; yet the token of His covenant with them is ever in His view, and He “doth not afflict nor grieve^k” them without regard to their final good. Amidst all the terrors of His restless might, and the severest dispensations of His providence, they may repose still upon God: they may approach Him with confidence; they may rely upon His goodness, safe and delighted in His presence, while there is a “rainbow round about His throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”

Here the transition is natural, from the Being whom it surrounds, to those who have an interest in the covenant of mercy, of which it is the significant token. While they continue pilgrims in this lower world, it is revealed to them as an object of faith, and an assurance to them of spiritual blessing and salvation. In this life evil has a constant flood. Though, through the long-suffering of God, it does not rise to a deluge, yet its waves unceasingly flow, alarming both the virtuous and the vicious. But to the former “there ariseth up light in the darkness^l.” To the faithful servants of the Most High, who exert to the utmost the powers He has given them, He shall give His Spirit to aid and crown their exertions, and to bring them in safety out of every trouble. In the seasons of temptation, when nature’s powers of resistance are feeble, He has promised the strength of His grace, to support them against the powerful tide. In times of affliction, when the waters “come

ⁱ Ps. xcvi. 2.

^k Lam. iii. 33.

^l Ps. cxii. 4.

even unto their souls^m," His Spirit is deputed to preserve them from fainting or sinking under the impetuosity of the waves. In the hour of death, when they are brought to the dark deep, at which nature shudders, but which all must pass, He has promised His staff, to buoy His redeemed over the cold flood; and His Spirit, to conduct them to the safe haven of the opposite shore. Thousands have realized the gracious promise; and the pledge of its fulfilment to all the upright, is the bow that perpetually surrounds His throne. If they are faithful, He "will look upon it, that He may remember the everlasting covenantⁿ," and "will never leave them, nor forsake them^o."

But it is the saints and spirits, who have their abode in the mansions of His house, that this rainbow of the celestial world is of most precious significance. They, in the widest sense, survive the devastation of a world. They have passed the floods of vice, and the cold waters of death. From the awful vengeance upon the ungodly, before which "the heavens shall pass away—the elements melt, and the earth be burned up^p," they are delivered. To them the Deity appears clothed in the emblems of love and salvation. While the token of covenanted mercy about Him tempers His ineffable perfections to their view, they behold in it the evidence, that the storms have subsided by which they were endangered: and the sure pledge, that none of the imperfections, troubles, dangers, and deaths, which they have escaped, shall ever again disturb their minds, or endanger their existence. To them, therefore, it is of most delightful appearance; the seal and security of inconceivable bliss. They are made happy, be-

^m Ps. lxi. 1

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 5.

^p Gen. ix. 16.

^q 2 Pet. iii. 10.

yond our conception, in the thought that the Deity, having graciously delivered them from the doom of a guilty world, looks always upon a remembrance of that covenant with the Son, by which He hath obliged Himself to perpetuate their felicity.

Such is the significance of that glory of heaven, with a description of which we are furnished in the text. Confirming this illustration, it may be remarked, that to Ezekiel was vouchsafed a vision of the majesty of the Deity in His high abode, who beheld with rapture the same glorious emblem about His throne, and thus depicts it: “As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord^q.”

From the contemplation of this glorious object, which St. John beheld in the celestial world, we may learn the fulness of the felicity of “the saints in light^r.” To escape the wrath of Heaven, and stand, saved by His mercy from the wreck of this world, before the Most High:—to dwell for ever in His presence, filled with the transporting assurance, that their sins are forgiven them, that the bitterness of death is past:—to see in “a rainbow round about” God’s “throne,” an infallible token that the floods of temptation, sorrow and death, shall no more come nigh them; but that the future shall be an eternal progress from knowledge to knowledge, from glory to glory:—this is the view which the Scriptures give us, of the happiness to which their spirits are brought, ‘who are departed in the true faith of His holy name.’

Which leads me to observe, secondly, from what has been said, the importance of having an interest in that covenant of safety, whose glorious token we

^q Ezek. i. 28.

^r Col. i. 12.

have been considering. What are the perishable joys, the grovelling pursuits, the fallacious vanities of this transient state, weighed in the balance of sober consideration with the realities of heaven which we have it in our power to secure? Do we flatter ourselves, that it will be time enough by and by, and trust to the sincerity of our intentions? Time steals away faster than we leave our follies, or can mend our pace; and ever and anon, some solemn monitor echoes the inspired instruction, "Now is the accepted time³." Do we trust that it will go well with us without our efforts? Unless a flood should execute vengeance on the ungodly, there would be little need of a bow, betokening safety to the upright. There is but one ark of preservation. It is that prepared by the Redeemer of the world: "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved⁴." If in this we embark ourselves, our hopes, and our cares, we shall be safe amidst all the storms of life. Providence will make us His charge, when He visits the earth with affliction. We shall ride triumphantly over death's dark waves, and resting under the auspices of an olive branch, brought by the heavenly dove upon the mount of God, the transcendent beauty of the spiritual rainbow shall refresh our sight, and rejoice us with the assurance of eternal safety.

Which suggests to us the sweet consolation our subject affords, under the departure of virtuous friends from our sight and embraces. How wisely does the Apostle exhort⁵, that we mourn not as without hope, for those that sleep in the Redeemer. When the survivor of the flood was safely moored upon the peaceful mount, who could have wished the exulting Patriarch back to the threatening of the

³ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

⁴ Acts iv. 12.

⁵ 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

tumultuous waves? When once he hath beheld the bow, proclaiming his perpetual safety from the waters, who could have wished him again exposed to the cares and perils which he had escaped? And when our friends have ‘passed the waves of this troublesome world,’ in the true faith and fear, and we have reason to trust that they have reached the celestial Ararat of rest and safety; who, that does not think more of his own happiness than of theirs, would wish them back to the cares, the sorrows, and the dangers of this vain world? Escaped to heaven from the storms and tempests of the dark flood, and rejoicing with inconceivable joy in the bright token “round about the throne,” that the waters of affliction and death shall no more approach them; they rather demand our gratulations than our tears. Let us then, my friends, cheerfully submit to the dispensations of God, whatever they may be, “knowing that all things work together for good to them that love^x,” and fear Him. The “rainbow” still glows “about the throne” of the Eternal; and He who sits upon the throne is still a God in covenant with the children of men. Let us then with patient perseverance “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness^y”; assured from the experience of the faithful, as well as by the token which surrounds His throne, that “He is faithful, who has promised^z.”

^x Rom. viii. 28.

^y Matt. vi. 33.

^z Heb. x. 23.

SERMON XCI.

ON THE DANGERS OF YOUTH.

PROVERBS, vii. 7.

I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding.

YOUTH is the most important part of man's life. If we compare life to a day, youth is the morning of it. The faculties and feelings are then strong and lively; the hours are favourable to activity; and he who wastes them in idleness or folly, will probably find his noon perplexed, and his evening destitute of the sweetest pleasure of the evening, a peaceful review of the day. If we compare life to a voyage, youth is the time of preparation. It is then we must choose our course, and provide the stores which may sustain, and the means which may improve or amuse us on our way: it is then our friends should be made glad, by seeing us well furnished for our destination, and the credentials be obtained, which may procure us safety, and favour, and distinction, in the regions to which we are bound. If we compare life to a year, youth is its spring-time, upon which the felicity of all the other seasons depends. It is then the seeds must be sown, and the plants cherished, whose fruits may delight us in summer, enrich us in autumn, and sustain and cheer us when winter shall have arrived. Whatever view we take of life, youth

is its most precious period : a period, which he who suffers it to go by unimproved, may afterwards bewail, but can never retrieve. The day may revolve, and morning again return. The year may elapse, and other springs appear. Oceans may be crossed, and the voyager may set out anew. But to human life there is but one morning, but one embarkation, but one spring. Of the advantages which youth may furnish us, we must avail ourselves as it passes ; or else be destitute of them for ever.

The pictures which the author of the book of Proverbs has drawn, are most of them taken from real life. Amongst them I know not one more striking and affecting than this, which is presented in the text. In the most interesting, important, and dangerous part of human life, there is seen "among the youths a young man void of understanding." Before him is vice, beckoning him with alluring arts to her impure abodes. Behind him are advancing, obscurely indeed, but with sure and rapid step, shame and remorse, and misery and ruin. Over this youth, I imagine angels and spirits of the just, looking down from the skies with the most anxious concern. By his side I behold a father with a beating bosom and a furrowed brow, observing with unutterable anguish the destruction of his fondest hopes. In a retired corner I see a female figure. It is a mother on her bended knees. She is looking to heaven with tears upon her cheek, and supplicating the Almighty to forgive and save her child. Gracious God ! Little do the young know, how great is the interest they excite in heaven and on earth ! Seldom do they consider, how deep is the cup, which their conduct may fill with wretchedness or bliss, both for themselves and others !

In looking round upon this assembly, I behold the greater part of it in the morning of life. For them

the following discourse is particularly designed. In it I shall set before them, some of the qualities which indicate in youth, a want of wisdom and understanding : and fondly I flatter myself, that they will give me that attention, which a sincere regard for their welfare may claim, whatever the discourse may want of novelty in its doctrines, or beauty in its dress.

Foremost among the qualities which mark the unwise youth, is a disregard of the principles and offices of Religion. It is Religion, which must elevate, purify, and adorn the human character. Sent from the courts of heaven by the everlasting Father, as the minister of His best blessings to mankind, she opens to the mind the sublimest truths ; she brings for the heart the most precious comforts ; she pours upon our paths the brightest light ; she conducts our steps to the highest bliss. Without her aid, the young man cannot “ cleanse his way^a ;” without her counsel, he cannot walk worthily of his high faculties, and destination ; without her protection, he will be a prey to his passions ; a prey to his inexperience ; a prey to the thousand delusions which lie in wait to deceive, and the ten thousand vices which lurk to destroy him. Manifest to all as the best guide of life, speaking in the name of the Almighty, and seeking only the improvement and everlasting happiness of mankind, where is the wisdom of rejecting her counsels, and despising her restraints ? What is there of understanding in setting at nought the God who made heaven and earth, and hath power to “ destroy both soul and body in hell^b ?” What is there of understanding in abandoning the altars, at which our fathers have worshipped and the service in which they found peace and salvation ? What

^a Ps. cxix. 9.

^b Matt. x. 28.

is there of understanding in departing from those principles and offices of religion, without which virtue has no encouragement, sorrow has no consolation, society can have no order, man has no certain hope? The youth who contemns religion, indicates thereby a deplorable want of wisdom. His judgment is at variance with his best interests. It is at variance with the opinions of the wisest and best men. It is at variance with the fountain of existence, and of every excellence. It is at variance with God. "Cease, my son," says the wisest of men, "to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do thereafter; the praise of it endureth for ever^d."

Another thing which marks the unwise youth, is his yielding himself up to the allurements of vice and folly. The young are surrounded with temptations. Vice spreads for them snares as enticing as they are destructive. In the city, in the place of concourse, they are exposed to courses, which are at once fascinating and ruinous. I speak not of the ordinary vices, into which they may be hurried by the contagion of a corrupted atmosphere. I have now particularly in view the extravagant, maddening riot at the wine; the impure haunts of illicit pleasures; and those graves of youthful excellence and promise, public gaming tables. Dreadful is the demoralization, incalculable are the evils which are born and fostered in these vicious resorts. Here the ingenuous blush of innocence is for ever dissipated; and the barriers against iniquity are thoughtlessly broken down. Here are sacrificed and abandoned the holy instructions, which fell from the parental lip upon

^c Prov. xix. 27.

^d Ps. cxi. 10.

the youthful heart, soft, and wholesome as the dew of heaven. Here the name of the Being, whom angels fear, is rudely profaned ; His laws, which carry the most awful sanctions, are defiled ; and conscience, the kind monitor which He has placed in the bosom, is trampled under foot. Here we may see the wrecks of genius, the destruction of fortune, the immolation of character, the dissipation of health, commencement of disquietude, progress of discontent, weariness and despondency of soul, unrestrained profligacy, and the consummation of wretchedness. Here—but I will proceed no further. Even those, whom the frequency of the scenes has hardened to their turpitude, even they would blush at the exposure to the innocent and wise of the criminality and debasement, to which they descend in these vicious resorts. And is not the youth “ void of understanding,” who in the earliest and most important period of his life suffers himself to be drawn into these vortices of ruin ? Reason, when she is heard, proclaims the danger. Conscience, could she be listened to, would remonstrate and entreat. The shades of pious ancestors descend ; the spectres of victims, who have been led on to destruction in those paths, appear to check the youth in his career, and turn him into the paths of safety. Yea, a voice is heard from the throne of the Almighty, calling to him in the language of inspiration, “ Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men : avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away ^e.” But passion, not reason, blind inclination, not manly sense, govern his conduct. There is nothing of the grace, or circumspection of wisdom in his steps. He goeth to his fatal indulgences, “ as an ox goeth to the slaughter ^f,” or “ as a bird hast-

^e Prov. iv. 14, 15.

^f Ibid. vii. 22.

eth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life ^g." And what will be the result of his foolishness?—"for all these things God will bring him into judgment ^h." "The evil days will come, and the years draw nigh, in which he shall say, I have no pleasure in them ⁱ." He will then look back with shame, upon the profligacies of his youth; and happy for him, if the Almighty do not leave him, in awful judgment upon his abuse of the advantages of a Christian education, to reap to the last "the fruit of his own way, and to be filled with his own devices ^k."

Another thing which indicates a want of wisdom and understanding in the young, is forming connections of friendship with unprincipled, and profligate persons. Sweet to the youthful bosom are the pleasures of friendship. Noble and unguarded is the freedom, with which our minds and hearts are then thrown open to those we love. And on this account it is of unspeakable importance, that the companions of our earliest days be such as may be worthy of our confidence, and capable of promoting in us the qualities and virtues, which exalt the human character. But by falling into intimacies with the vicious, this source of generous joy, this spring of youth's most exquisite pleasure, may be converted into a source of disappointments and debasement. For he who can wrong his God; who can renounce the obligations of religion and virtue; who can disregard the feelings of his parents, and virtuous connections, what reasonable ground can there be for confidence in him, that he will not wrong his friend? Besides, the influence and example of such a one are fatal to the fairest and best properties of youth. What does the voice of wisdom so often lament? over what is

^g Prov. vii. 23.

^h Eccles. xi. 9.

ⁱ Eccles. xii. 1.

^k Prov. i. 31.

experience so often seen shedding the tears of regret, as the ruins which are occasioned by evil company? I see an amiable youth, upon whom kindred affection has fastened the fondest hopes. His talents are good, the best principles were early instilled into his bosom by parental assiduity; and in a course of manly and virtuous pursuits he might be distinguished in society, and an ornament amongst the works of God. He steps into the world. The unprincipled and profligate meet him: and with all the eagerness of fallen spirits bent on mischief, resolve to make him a partaker of their shame. His simplicity renders him their easy prey. With fair speech they gain access to his heart, and with guilty artifices they kindle his passions. They take him to the orgies of folly. With blind infatuation he follows them to the haunts of vice, and to the abodes of pollution. His former principles they now laugh to scorn. His boldness in iniquity they extol and encourage. They draw him at length into all the dreadful excesses of their own guilt. And he who was once like the young cedar of Lebanon, fair and strong, and promising much growth and beauty, is now like the scathed tree, shorn of his glory, marked with the vengeance of heaven, and exhibiting a melancholy spectacle of worthlessness, and untimely decay. Who sees not in this youth a “young man void of understanding?” He has chosen those for his friends, who were destitute of principle and virtue, and therefore were only capable of promoting his debasement and destruction. And what is his recompence for the sacrifices they have led him to make? Even to be reduced to the same level with them; to be deserted by them, in all probability, when they have stript him of his virtue, his fortune, and respectability; and to be one day ashamed of them at the bar of the Almighty, as the panders of

his vices, and promoters of his misery. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not¹." "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed^m."

It is another indication of "a youth void of understanding," to be wholly occupied about the decorations of his person, and the display of external pomp or accomplishments. There is an attention to the decencies of dress, which is conducive to the well-being of society. And if by an attention to manners, men may smooth the asperities of social intercourse, and render themselves more pleasant and agreeable to each other, this also is a laudable, and a Christian duty. But there are many, with whom the adorning of their persons is the principal source of self-satisfaction, and the chief business of life. Man is an intelligent being. He has glorious faculties to cultivate. He has noble duties to discharge. He has an immortal soul to improve. He has eternal life to secure. What can more strikingly indicate a want of that wisdom, by which such a being should be distinguished, than to have his faculties absorbed, and his ambition satisfied, with the transient vanities of external attire? Besides, how contemptible is the distinction, which is merely superficial! The bee, that gathers treasures from every flower, has not the finest coating. The eagle that soars on majestic wings to the birth of the morning, has not the most glittering plumage. It is the butterfly, that idly flutters on the passing breeze, which the fopling emulates. The care of the body is more with him, than the care of the mind. With usefulness and virtue, with knowledge and heaven to engage him, behold him the slave of a colour, or a fashion; placing his glory in that, in which inferior animals may often

¹ Prov. i. 10.

^m Ibid. xiii. 20.

vie with him, and flowers and plants excel him. Such a young man, whom dress alone occupies and delights, will be claimed by folly as her legitimate child. Wisdom rejects him; intelligence sighs over him, as “a young man void of understanding.”

I add, in the last place, that habitual idleness is a characteristic of an unwise youth. Idleness at any age is the parent of vice and unhappiness. In the morning of life it is peculiarly inexcusable and ruinous. The youth who has nothing to do will learn to do evil. Neglecting to cultivate the noble powers of his nature, he will be drawn into habits of dissipation. All the advantages of early industry in procuring knowledge, fortune, character, and esteem, he will forego, and he will in all probability be restless and dissatisfied; a burden to himself in the hours of reflection, and a useless cumberer of the ground. Nor can he find any palliation of his folly in the plea, that he finds nothing to do. There is ever enough to employ usefully the hours of every one's life. Go; cultivate and expand the noble faculties which thy Creator hath given thee. Go; call into exercise and useful application the powers that lie dormant in thy nature. Go; search the pages of wisdom; traverse the regions of truth; and by acquisition of knowledge lay the foundation of future usefulness to thy country, and to the world. Go; seek the Most High God, thy Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Consider studiously, what it is that He requireth of thee, in order that thou mayest spend wisely the years of this fleeting life. Go; bring to the habitation of thy parents the reviving fragrance of a good name; and get to thyself the habit, in which thou mayest emulate angels, the habit of industriously doing good. Go and do this, and much more that is equally obvious and worthy of thee; before thou complainest in apology for thy indo-

lence, that thou findest nothing to do. Unhappy the youth, in whose mouth is this delusive plea ! For him the best years of life will pass away, without furnishing the foundations of respectability and comfort. On him, neither peace nor prosperity, neither public esteem, nor self-satisfaction will ever wait : but in their stead, that contempt which the common sense of society fastens upon those, who have no object nor employment ; and that weariness, dissatisfaction, and self-reproach, to which the Almighty, in His justice, generally exposes the inactive. With great propriety, therefore, has experience always recommended to the young a definite pursuit, and diligent occupation : and it is with striking and apposite acuteness, that Solomon represents “ the field of the slothful,” as the same ground, with the “ vineyard of the man void of understanding ”.

Thus I have set before you, some of the qualities which indicate the character in the text. As you have accompanied me in these observations, you have perceived and felt, that they are qualities, by which human nature is degraded ; prosperity, improvement, and happiness frustrated ; and the best hopes of society, the hopes which depend upon the rising generation, most unhappily blasted. Be induced then, my young friends, to use industriously the morning of your lives. Let not your attention be absorbed, and your ambition satisfied with external decorations and distinctions. As you would avoid taking fire-brands into your bosoms, guard against admitting to the near intimacies of friendship, the unprincipled and vicious. With a discretion worthy of your rational, and immortal natures, “ flee youthful lusts °,” and avoid the resorts of pollution and abasement. Above all things, “ know you the God

* Prov. xxiv. 30.

° 2 Tim. ii. 22.

of your fathers, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind ^p ?” Cherish for religion that respect, which you would cherish for the guardian of your race ; and the arrows which are aimed at her name or services, consider them as aimed at the shades of your forefathers, and at the dearest interests of the world. Then shall the hearts of your parents be gladdened with the knowledge of your wisdom and discretion ; then shall your country find in you her glory and defence ; then shall the Church rest upon you, as her strong and affectionate supporters ; then shall your bosoms be filled with self-approbation, and the peace of God ; then at whatever period death shall remove you to other duties and other worlds, you shall not depart prematurely : “ for honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years : but *wisdom* is the gray hair unto men, and an *unspotted life* is old age ^q .”

^p 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^q Wisd. iv. 8, 9.

S E R M O N X C I I .

—◆—
ON THE DISTRESSES OF THE POOR IN WINTER.
—◆—

ST. MARK, xiii. 18.

Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.

OUR blessed Lord is, in this chapter, informing His disciples of the awful calamities which should come upon Jerusalem, after His ascension; calamities, “such as had not been since the beginning of the world to that time, no, nor ever should be^a” afterwards. Of these evils He forewarns them, and instructs them how to act for their own escape and preservation. Among other precepts which He gave them, “Pray ye,” says the compassionate Saviour, “that your flight be not in the winter.”

At this inclement season*, these words do the more forcibly strike our attention. Let us meditate upon them. They will present some topics to our minds, worthy of our consideration.

And in the first place, they remind us of the severities of Winter. This cold and hoary monarch is not content with stripping the earth of all its vegetative beauty, and covering it with a dreary garb,

^a Matt. xxiv. 21.

* This discourse was preached in Charleston, in a rigorous winter, after a fall of snow.

he compels the beings who have life, and inherent warmth, to bow beneath his icy sceptre. The beasts are mute and chilled; the birds flee to their coverts; and man, feeling in winter the awful power of God, cries, “Who can stand before His cold^b?” In this season, the exposed and the destitute endure peculiar hardships. The wandering traveller plods comfortless on his way; the poor seaman eyes the billows with horror, and shivers in the storm. To the children of want it is a time of complicated wretchedness. They feel, alas! that Winter furnishes poverty with fangs, which she has at no other season.

But amidst all the severities of winter, we may discover the benevolence of God. How wonderful is that goodness which leads instinctively a part of the animal tribes, from the inhospitality of a wintry region, to milder climes! How equally tender is that kindness, which tempers the bleak and frosty winds to the sides of the little birds, and more helpless beasts, which He has taught to remain! How gracious is that providence, which causes the earth, in the seasons of her fertility, to produce a sufficient provision for the dreary months, when winter will check her fertility, and bind her furrows with frost! How merciful is that forethought, which has stored a marvellous element in the forest, and the bowels of the earth, to furnish man, when the sun departs from his zenith, with a pleasant substitute for the warmth of his beams! And when we consider, how many human beings are exposed, some tossed at sea, amidst the horrors of the waves and fierce raging of the storms; others naked on the land to the scourgings of the tempest, and oppressed with the hardships, beneath which, it should seem, that human nature would sink;—when we contemplate these ex-

^b Ps. cxlvii. 17.

posures of multitudes of our race, and behold them brought through all the dangers and sufferings of the season, to the joys and hopes of spring:—who sees not that the God who rules the winter, is the same merciful God who rules the year? The displays of His power, are indeed at this season more awful. We see Him in the terrors of His might. But He is nevertheless kind.

Which leads me to another topic which the text suggests, that to Him should all men, and especially those ‘who are in danger and necessity,’ apply for protection ‘from the evils to which they may be exposed.’ It is God who causeth the winter. “He giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar frost like ashes^c.” Again, “He sendeth forth His word, and melteth them; He bloweth with His wind, and the waters flow^d.” He therefore has power to mitigate the rigours of our condition. To His Father the Redeemer sends His disciples, for preservation from the calamities to which winter might expose them. And to whom should those who are in danger of necessity, so confidently go, as to their heavenly Father, who maketh the wool to be warm on the lamb, “and feedeth the young ravens that call upon Him^e?” Art thou then exposed at this season upon the billows of the ocean, or filled with distress for thy seafaring friends? Look up with devotion to that Almighty Being, who rides upon the tempest which scours the deep. Art thou fearful of the conflagration which so often increases the calamities of this season? Use that prudence which God has given thee for thy direction, and supplicate the protection of the shadow of His wing. Art thou among the children of poverty, and for want of food, of raiment, or of fuel, dost thou mourn in the wintry

^c Ps. cxlvii. 16.

^d Ibid. ver. 18.

^e Ibid. ver. 9.

blast? Go to the God who heareth prayer. With humility make thy wants known to Him; entreat Him, for His Son's sake, to compassionate thy distresses; and, if He have not some better purpose to accomplish by withholding thy wishes, He will devise a way for thy safety, and supply thy wants. For He despiseth not "the prayer of the poor destitute^f;" but when he maketh his cry, His ear hearkeneth thereto.

This suggestion will be enforced, if we observe another thing which the text most strikingly and affectingly impresses upon our minds, namely, the compassionate nature of the blessed Redeemer, who is our Intercessor at the right hand of God. Every act of His life was a display of tenderness and love. Whether we consider Him, descending from the bosom of His Father, and taking our nature upon Him for the recovery of our race from perdition; or contemplate Him while He dwelt upon earth, making it His meat and drink to enable the poor to forget his poverty, and the afflicted to remember her misery no more; or behold Him on the cross, seeking with persevering benevolence the pardon and salvation of His wretched enemies; we have sufficient evidence of the loveliness of compassion, and that it dwelt in the bosom of our Lord in an unspeakable perfection. But in the little incident which the text records, there is a refined sensibility, an exquisite tenderness, which will touch every feeling heart. He knew how rigorous are the severities of winter. He knew how multiplied and bitter are the miseries which it brings upon those, whom adversity has laid bare to its inclemencies. For His poor disciples His heart was afflicted. He dreaded that the calamities, in which they were about to be involved, should be aggravated

^f Ps. ciii. 17.

by the hardships and sufferings which attend this season. His kindness anticipated their distresses, and He taught them where to look for preservation. "Pray ye," said their affectionate Master, "that your flight be not in the winter."

This compels me to remark, in the fourth place, that if the same mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus^g, this season will excite in our bosoms a sympathetic concern for all those, who are exposed to its sorrows. Now will the good Christian offer his petition with increased fervour, 'for all who travel by land or by water.' Now will his heart be moved, and his hands be opened, by the distresses of the poor and needy. The howling wind seems to remind us of their necessities. The cold and storm knock at our hearts in their behalf. Ah! my brethren, you sit by your fire-sides sheltered from all the inclemencies of the winter. Your clothing is warm and good. Your houses are comfortable about you. And your tables are covered with food, "enough and to spare^h." You know nothing of the miseries of want. Come with me to the habitation of poverty. It is rugged and of wretched appearance. But it contains your fellow beings. Do not decline then to enter. Here, in the cheerless chamber, dwells the poor widow. She "gathers" for herself a few "sticks," and dresses a "handful of mealⁱ;" and the rest of the day sits shivering over the embers; full often ready, in the bitterness of her anguish, to wish to herself that she might die. Are you moved by this scene of misery? Alas! my friends, it is but one of many, which may be found in our world. Come, and I will take you to another habitation. There, in that bleak and confused hut, dwells a whole family of wretchedness. I cannot

^g Phil. ii. 5.

^h Luke xv. 17.

ⁱ 1 Kings xvii. 12.

tell where is he, who should be the support of the household. The mother sits stunned with cold and sorrow, unable to give food but to one of her offspring, and that from her own impoverished bosom. Her children are crying around her. They are hungry. They are cold. And when the long wished for night arrives, and they betake themselves to the thin and ragged bed, who can say whether sleep, sometimes a soother of the wretched, is able to give to this chilled and famished family any respite from their woe? Oh! ye, whom Providence has blessed with abundance; who have riches more, much more than you use; think of what happiness you may be the authors, by bestowing here a portion of that wealth, which you must presently leave to you know not whom! And ye, who have only a competence of the good things of this life, is there nothing superfluous in your comforts, or is any gratification you may forego, to be compared in value and delight, with “the blessing of those that were ready to perish^k ;” which, believe me, is often heard and sealed by the God of heaven. We are commanded, my brethren, to “charge you that are rich in this world, to be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate^l ;” and I know not how I may more powerfully enforce this charge than by remarking, that unless this spirit of compassion, which was in the bosom of Christ Jesus, and would have preserved His poor disciples from the sufferings of winter, be also in you, Himself hath declared you are none of His.

Such are some of the topics, which this interesting passage in our Saviour’s life is calculated to suggest. Let me hope they are not impertinent to the season, and will not be unprofitable. You are about to commemorate the greatest act of Divine compassion, in

^k Rom. xxix. 13.

^l 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

the incarnation of the Son of God, and many of you are preparing yourselves to go up and be feasted with the bread of life, at the table of your Lord. Benevolence is the garment in which, on that day, every Christian should appear. It has been a godly custom of the Church, to exact an offering of her sons at that festival, for the poor of "the household of faith^m." Need I say that they at this season, need your liberal assistance? Their number is not lessened, though those, alas! are diminished, who were wont to contribute to their relief. The expences too of living are so much enhanced, that what would formerly have supplied a day, will now scarcely furnish a meal. With these considerations, Christians, enlarge your charity. Bring to the feast an offering worthy of the occasion, and worthy of the acceptance of God. It is not merely in behalf of the poor, though I gladly appear the humble organ of their wants, but it is also in "Christ's stead, that I beseech youⁿ," "be ye merciful, as your Father" in heaven "is merciful^o."

^m Gal. vi. 10.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 20.

^o Luke vi. 36.

DISCOURSE,

PREACHED ON

The Occasion of the Death

OF THE

RIGHT REV. BISHOP DEHON.

BY THE

REV. CHRISTOPHER E. GADSDEN,

RECTOR OF ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON.

This Discourse was published at the request of the Vestry and Wardens of ' St. Michael's Church,' and also ' of the Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South Carolina.' Some Corrections have been made, and a few Notes have been added, by the Author, in the present Edition, which were not received in time for the former Edition of this Work.

DISCOURSE,

§c.

 REV. ii. 10.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

ON the last day of his life our departed Bishop was asked—‘On what promise of God do you now rest?’—and he replied, “*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” He said a second time, “*thee*” with emphasis: and added, ‘There you have it all, the promise and the condition.’

It is my intention to lay before you such particulars of his life, as I have been able to collect. To his friends, I know, I shall not be tedious. The facts to be detailed will, I am persuaded, carry to the mind the conviction that his example enforced his precept, and to the heart the chief consolation under the sorrow for his death, that he has received a crown of glory.

Theodore Dehon, was born in Boston, on the 8th of December, 1776*; and in early life was remarked for his personal beauty, the index, in his case, of a celestial disposition. Under a pious mother, he was religiously educated. She regularly, on Sunday evenings, heard her children repeat the catechism—read to them the Holy Scriptures; and, at the appointed seasons, conducted them to the church to be catechized by the minister. In the Latin school of the town

* Soon after the evacuation of that town by the English forces. He departed this life, August 6, 1817, after an illness of six days.

he passed seven years, and he has expressed his approbation of the old English system of instruction there adopted, and his affection for his preceptor (the late Mr. Hunt) 'who,' he remarked, 'loved to teach*.' He passed the four succeeding years at Harvard University in Cambridge, and here, as at school, received the first honour of his class †. For his *alma mater* he retained much affection. He loved to look at her stately walls, and to speak of his college friend ‡, and of those families in the village whose hospitality had soothed the labours of the student.—He often declared that his happiest days were at that season, in which, with little experience of the depravity of mankind, he had pursuits, associates, and prospects, calculated to awaken all the energies of the mind and heart. While he was pursuing his studies, he engaged in the business of keeping a school, and

* Dehon was remarkable for his docility and love of learning. The prevailing wish of his heart from his earliest youth to become a Minister of the Gospel, excited him to unremitting exertions. In the common amusements of youth he took little delight, but devoted all his leisure to such reading as was adapted to his years. The scholars, even those who were some years older than himself, looked to him, as to a superior being. He had in consequence the love and approbation of his instructor, and was often called upon to assist him in his labours. *Extract from a Letter by the Rev. Mr. Cranston, resident in Savannah.*

† The promise of peculiar excellence, which had attracted the attention of those who knew him in his early youth, was now seen and acknowledged. The years that he spent at the University, were an honourable testimony of his moral principles, and of his mental powers. Amidst the numerous temptations inseparable from a seminary of youth, he afforded an example of persevering industry. Though he naturally possessed a generous independence of mind, he never failed to exhibit a perfect respect for his instructors, and the laws of the College: and his amiable deportment endeared him to all his acquaintances. Those who knew him there, declared that his love of piety and virtue, and his hatred of vice were remarkably great. At the commencement in 1795, though he was then scarcely nineteen years of age, he obtained his first degree in Arts, and received the honours of the University, having performed the English Oration, which is considered the highest appointment in the exercises of the day. *Mr. C. ut supra.*

‡ The late Mr. Francis Channing, who was his room mate.

on the Lord's day officiated as a lay reader at Cambridge, and once or twice at Newport in Rhode-Island. He was, by his own choice, destined from early youth to the sacred office, and was admitted a Deacon in 1798, and a Priest in 1800, by Bishop Bass. He received confirmation from Bishop Seabury *, the first consecrated of our Bishops. He

* The Rev. Samuel Seabury, D. D. was sent over to England soon after the ratification of the treaty of peace with the United States, on a mission from such of the English Clergy as survived the calamities of that period, for the purpose of obtaining Episcopal Consecration, with a view to the settlement and perpetuity of the Church in the United States on the truly Apostolical pattern of the Church of England: and was most favourably received by his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Moore,) and others of the English Bishops, who could not but feel very desirous of effecting a measure which had been frequently recommended to his Majesty's Government by the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, from the earliest period of its institution; a measure, which in the Reign of Queen Anne had very nearly been accomplished, and which, if it had been then or even at a later period accomplished, it has been thought, might have averted the horrors of the unnatural contest of the Colonies with the Parent State. However, several difficulties having presented themselves to the Archbishop and his Colleagues, which it was thought could not be removed without the Aid of Parliament; Dr. Seabury wearied with delay applied to the remnant of the Bishops and Clergy in Scotland, who, notwithstanding the severity of many penal statutes, had still preserved the genuine succession of the Episcopacy, and the faith and discipline of the Church in its utmost purity: and he was accordingly consecrated a Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Connecticut at Aberdeen, on the 14th November, 1784, by the Right Rev. R. Kilgour, Bishop of Aberdeen, primus, assisted by the Right Rev. Arthur Petrie, Bishop of Ross and Moray, and the Right Rev. John Skinner, Coadjutor to Bishop Kilgour.

The Act of Parliament 26 Geo. III. chap. 84. having authorized the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, &c., to consecrate to the office of a Bishop persons being subjects or citizens of Foreign States;—The Rev. Dr. William White and Dr. Samuel Provost were on Sunday the 4th of February, 1787, consecrated in the Archiepiscopal Chapel at Lambeth, Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania and New York, by his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, (Dr. Moore) assisted by the Lord Archbishop of York, (Dr. Markham) the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells, (Dr. Moss) and the Lord Bishop of Peterborough (Dr. Hinchliff.)

accepted the charge of Trinity Church in Newport, Rhode-Island: and, by his uncommon prudence, though he was then only twenty-one years of age, settled some unfortunate dissensions that had long existed in the Church, and produced a harmony among its members which was never afterwards interrupted*. He had the unbounded affection of this people. They seemed to watch his every motion, and to consider him as almost more than mortal. They anticipated his wishes. They made every little incident an occasion for some token of kindness. When his health was feeble, they urged him in summer to go to the Springs, and in winter to a Southern clime †. This was an important period for us.

At a subsequent period, Dr. James Madison was consecrated Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia, in the Archiepiscopal Chapel at Lambeth, on Sunday the 19th September, 1790, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, assisted by Dr. Porteus, Bishop of London, and Dr. Thomas, Bishop of Rochester.

The Church, thus happily constituted, is now in a very flourishing condition, for which see an extract from a Sermon by Bishop Moore prefixed to the first volume of these Sermons.

* This is stated nearly in the words of a person who was a member of his congregation in Newport, the Rev. Mr. Cranston.

† During the time of his residence in Newport, he constantly grew in the affections of his people. He was an example to age as well as to youth. He possessed the same self-control, which always distinguished him. Against the irreproachable integrity of his life, enmity never whispered a suspicion; and it was a common remark that he could not be censured even for an act of imprudence. His gentle manners, his piety and goodness of heart, secured him universal esteem; and the benevolence and heavenly charity, which made his future bright career so useful, and which will make his death so widely afflicting, were permanent traits of his character. Entertaining the most grand and lovely apprehensions of the Deity; his devotion yielded him his highest pleasure, and fitted him to kindle the sacred flame in others. It was as rational as warm; consisting not in occasional sallies and inconstant flashes, but was a steady divine flame, fed by the clearest and strongest persuasion and most worthy apprehensions of the Divine perfections and providence; and it animated his whole deportment. His taste for the nobler pleasures of literature, devotion, and benevolence, made it easy for him to observe the strictest temperance. He was naturally of a

In his first visit to this state in 1803, his health permitted him to officiate only a few times. He was generally admired *; and it was observed by one of our Clergy †, that he should be happy to have that young man Bishop of the Diocese. He was soon after invited to be the Assistant Minister of St. Philip's Church. He had many inducements to accept this appointment. The climate was more congenial to his constitution; the society more diversified; the means of improvement better in this metropolis, and the congregation much larger. He resisted these considerations, and remained at Newport. He sought, from the studies and cares of his profession, relaxation in the culture of a little garden, an occupation in which he had delight, and which, let me observe, he relinquished in Carolina, on account of his increased duties to the Church. He had a still higher gratification, in guiding the disposition and the mind of a sister, who, from childhood, was entirely under his superintendance. Many of our citizens were of his congregation in Newport, and some of them, in sickness, sorrow, and

cheerful temper, considering cheerfulness as a kind of habitual gratitude to the Author of his being, and while he constantly paid this homage himself, he enabled, by his example, all about him to pay it.

His habitual hearers used to observe, that his sermons were remarkably equal and always interesting. Such was their satisfaction in hearing his discourses, that they never were pleased to see his place in the pulpit occupied by another.

He was my Minister—the only one of my youth. I cannot express the feelings that crowd upon my heart, when I think that he is no more. I cannot tell my sense of his worth or of our loss. We seem to lament the removal of one of the higher order of beings, who had taken his abode on earth for a time to teach us the way to heaven, and is now returned to his native place. How interesting and glorious is the path by which the righteous ascend to God! His was indeed the path of the just, which like the shining light shines more and more unto the perfect day. *Mr. C.*

* One of the discourses he preached at that time, for our Orphan Asylum, was from the text—“*And behold the babe wept.*” He was remarkable for selecting the most striking passages as the texts of his sermons.

† The late Rev. Thomas Frost, rector of St. Philip's Church.

death, received his consolation. In the year 1804, the vestry of St. Philip's again endeavoured to procure the services of Mr. Dehon, and tendered to him the rectorate of that Church, recently vacated. But, though his health was still suffering by the climate of Rhode-Island, he declined this invitation; and, it is believed, subsequently, invitations from Baltimore and elsewhere: having, it appears, formed a resolution that he would remain, as long as a proper regard for life would permit, with his first charge. He gave them his prayers always, and his presence whenever practicable; and, in his last rapid visit to the Northern states, expressed much gratification in an opportunity of seeing them once more, and administering to them the Supper of the Lord. In the year 1808, as a member of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, at Baltimore, he distinguished himself by a temperate but steady opposition to the proposal for setting forth additional hymns, a measure which he disapproved as an innovation on the service of the Church. He attracted the particular attention of the venerable Bishop White, who then said, that he hoped to see him in the house of Bishops. He soon after received the degree of Doctor of Divinity, from the College of New Jersey; in consequence, as there is reason to believe, of the ability exhibited on that occasion. In the year 1809, the rectorate of St. Michael's Church in this city was tendered to him, and as his ill health very frequently prevented his officiating, and it had become evident, that if he remained at Newport he must die, he determined to visit South-Carolina; and in the course of the winter formed his decision as to his future residence. With singular delicacy and candour he stated to the Vestry, that he felt himself under obligations to St. Philip's Church for their esteem, evinced in their having twice invited him to be their Minister; and that on this account he would prefer that Church, should it be vacant, and he should conclude to remove. During several months he deliberated seriously on the course which duty called him to pursue. He made it a subject of frequent and anxious prayer, and asked the counsel and the

prayers of pious friends. He had the greatest confidence in prayer; and would quote that promise, “*If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven*.”^a Before, almost, every undertaking—the writing of a sermon, the commencing of a journey, attendance on a society, and a visit of business—he would have recourse to prayer.

He had for seven years the sole charge of the large congregation of St. Michael’s Church. He wished the funds of the Church to accumulate, so that his successor might have an assistant; but he was unwilling that they should be impaired for his accommodation. His labours here were very great. On the Lord’s Day, he has been engaged in his duties, with little intermission for ten hours. He has performed morning service, administered the communion, and immediately gone to a sick chamber—come thence to afternoon service, and returning to the sick person, remained with him until nine o’clock at night. How often was he seen at the altar with a body ready to sink, supported by the vigour of an intense devotion! In his sermons he constantly presented to his hearers “*Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*.”^d His first sermon was from the text, “*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ*,”^c and his last from these words, “*Ye are complete in Him*.”^b He loved to dwell on the nature of the ordinances, on the characters of the Saints commemorated by the Church, and on the excellence of the Liturgy*, so as to induce his people to value prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures more, and Sermons less. He thought that the best preaching was that of inspired men, and of our Lord Himself, contained in the lessons read in the daily ser-

^a Matt. xviii. 19.

^c Rom. i. 16.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^d Col. ii. 10.

* A discourse of his on this subject, in the first volume, was published at the request of the *Society for the advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania*, by whom it is now circulated as one of the best tracts on that subject. His discourses on Confirmation, which are now inserted in the first volume, are, probably, the most complete vindication of that ordinance, to be found in any work.

vicc. He considered the Lord's Supper the great means of increasing the numbers of the faithful, and would have wished to have it administered every Sunday: and when he became Bishop, he advised the Clergy, in their visits to the vacant parishes, every time to 'set up the altar.' He thought that in general, more good was to be expected from public prayer, the administration of the Sacraments, catechizing, and the visits of the Clergy, than from preaching: and that too many came to Church to hear, not to pray; to gratify taste and curiosity, rather than to humble themselves before God. He believed that they who came to Church from incorrect motives, might be induced in time to attend from right motives: and would occasionally allure such persons with a feast of fancy*, which showed his powers in this way. In his style he preferred the persuasive to the vehement manner, and resembled Bishop Horne, and St. John, (his favourite apostle,) rather than Horsley, or the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul. His delivery was slow, partly from choice, for he remembered the precept, "*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God.*" In prayer he was engaged heart and mind, and succeeded, to a very great degree, in losing sight of the objects around him. In the offices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, his whole deportment was most solemn and affecting. In catechizing the little children he had particular pleasure, and was so interesting that their parents liked to be present. In the chamber of sickness and affliction he was often seen, and was always a most welcome visitor †.

* This remark will naturally revive a recollection of his sermon from the text, "*There was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre.*" John xix. 41.—*Vide the 81st Sermon in this collection.*

† Eccles. v. 2.

† It had been a custom among the pious in our community, on the death of a friend, to seclude themselves even from the public services of the Church, but he succeeded to a great extent in recommending the better example of king David, who under the loss of his child, went to the temple for consolation. *Vide the 87th Sermon in this collection.*

In the day of trouble, strangers, and the members of other congregations sought with avidity his counsel and consolation. He visited the people of his charge, not as often as he and they wished, but as often as his more important duties would permit. If in this matter he made any distinction, it was in favour of families in humble life. He was a most patient instructor of the illiterate Africans. He encouraged them to partake of the ordinance of Baptism, and while they were preparing for it, had them frequently at his house. In accommodating his instructions to their capacities, an undertaking entirely new to him, he succeeded to a remarkable degree. With his brethren of the Clergy, he had now attained the influence of a Bishop. If there was any difference of opinion on ecclesiastical affairs, they were led to serious deliberation, and this usually terminated in a conviction that he was right, and they were wrong. Under his influence '*the Protestant Episcopal Society for the advancement of Christianity in South Carolina,*' was organized and attained unrivalled prosperity; measures were adopted for restoring the harmony of our state convention, which in the course of a few years completely effected that desirable object; and a general disposition was produced in the minds of both the Clergy and the laity, to adhere strictly to the * rules of our excellent Church, particularly in relation to Baptism, and to the observance of the festivals. I repeat, these important results were accomplished, before he was elected Bishop, by the influence of his kind and sensible expostulations.

In the year 1812, the Convention, by an unanimous vote, elected him our Bishop. Into the views of the pious, in relation to the necessity of this order, he had heartily entered, but he had sincerely hoped that the choice would not fall on himself. This was probably the most anxious moment

* He was strict in his compliance with the Rubrics and Canons of the Church in obedience to his solemn ordination vows, and he thought also, that these regulations contained, in general, the collected wisdom of the pious in many ages; and that the unity and peace of the Church were endangered by a deviation from them.

of his life. In accepting, said he, there is much responsibility incurred, but there is, perhaps, as much in declining. He was accustomed to look at both sides of every question. He put out of view every consideration but the Church. He saw that this office would locate him in this state, whereas, if his health should be established, he might return to his native country and near relations. He saw the labours, the privations, the anxieties, and the misconceptions to which he would be exposed in the exercise of this office, so little known in our country. He saw that it would take him from the sphere, endeared to him by natural inclination, by early association and habit, and place him on an elevation afflicting to his diffidence: for to him, as to Addison, honours were burdens. He felt, above all, a most humble conviction of his own imperfections, and insufficiency in himself, for a station of such high trust. He devoted much time to prayer. He read, with particular attention, in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, the qualifications of a Bishop. He frankly stated his difficulties to his brethren of the Clergy. They intreated him to accept the office, and declared their impression, that Providence seemed to make it his duty. He formed, at this time, two resolutions, should he obtain the office of Bishop, that it should never be to him a source of emolument; and that he would endeavour to be more condescending than ever, as he expressed it. ‘the servant of all.’ He committed to a paper, (which has been discovered since his decease) the following observations:—‘It having pleased Almighty God to permit me to be called to the office of a Bishop in His Church, I ought to be humbled to the dust, by the sense of my unworthiness; and penetrated with gratitude, love, and fear, for this undeserved distinction.—*Lord! what am I, or what is my Father’s house, that thou shouldest bring me to this honour in thy service?*—I have examined my past life. Oh! how little do I find, with which to be satisfied! how much to condemn! “*God be merciful to me a sinner*”^f” Would men inspect

^f Luke xviii. 13.

themselves closely by the light of God's word, how little cause would they find in themselves for self-complacency.—Alas, my best services have been alloyed with too much selfishness; and conscience accuses me of many sins. Never have I felt myself so poor and needy, so culpable and wretched, so much a subject for mercy, rather than favour. “*Lord, what is man, that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man that Thou so regardest him^g?*” At times I have felt as if I would give worlds, if I had them, could I but go spotless into the office whereunto I have been permitted to be called. Perhaps there is something of pride and self-love in this. “*There is none good but One^h.*” All whom He has employed, from among men, have been sinners. In Him alone can there be any glorying; to Him must be all glory. Saul who persecuted, and Peter who denied Jesus, were employed as Apostles by Him, and their conversion has scarcely done less than their labours for His cause.—I hope God has presented me with this most humbling view of myself, that I may perceive fully at my entrance on this office, that if I stand at all, it must be in the worthiness of Christ: that in me there is no good thing to give me authority, power, complacency or confidence: that I must act by His authority and power; be a dependant of His; and owe every thing to Him;—especially that I may know and feel the absolute necessity, the amazing extent, the obliging power of His mercy in Christ Jesus; and so have a fuller sense of the importance of the treasure entrusted to me. My best delight has been in His law. My fondest joy*****.’

This abrupt termination shews that we have here only a fragment. It is much to be regretted that the concluding reflections, if they were ever committed to paper, have not been found.

He was consecrated to the Episcopate on the 15th of October, 1812. His life had been rather retired, but he soon became familiar with all the duties of a public station. In the chair of the *state convention*, he exhibited the utmost dig-

^g Ps. cxliv. 3.

^h Matt. xix. 17.

nity and impartiality, and greatly facilitated business by the collectedness and discrimination of his mind. In administering the Episcopal rites, he had an expression of air and countenance of the most engaging character; and he preserved his interesting manner throughout the services, although they were protracted for many hours, and sometimes interrupted by want of sympathy in those around him*. In his visitations, he never lost sight of his proper business. In the social circle, the affairs of the Church were made the subject of conversation, introduced by him, and continued as long as there was any prospect of doing good. In the vacant parishes, the candidates for the ordinances were often privately instructed by himself; and he would go many miles out of his way to visit the Christian inquirer, the sick and the afflicted, who had no minister of their own. His duties to a large congregation would not permit his absence for any length of time: many of the parishes were remote from his residence, and his episcopal visits were necessarily made during six months of the year, as in the summer, the planters usually leave their home: his journeys, therefore, occasioned much exposure and fatigue. He sometimes travelled beyond midnight; and, after holding service in one church, has had to hasten to another at a distance, without any of that refreshment which a grateful people wished to bestow. He succeeded, under the Divine blessing, in his endeavours to revive the worship of the Church in several parishes, where it had long been neglected; and to establish it in some places, where it had never been known; among which, *Columbia* may be mentioned as a station of peculiar importance, the capital of the state and the seat of its college. He felt much solicitude for those members of the Church scattered through the country, and particularly in the Western districts, who had no opportunity of enjoying her ordinances, and corres-

* His appearance while in the act of '*laying on of hands*,' and at a consecration, as he proceeded up the aisle is recollected by many, as of a character which the best efforts of the pencil could never portray.

ponded with some of them on the subject of the course they should pursue, until they became sufficiently numerous to form congregations. The candidates for the ministry, in our church, having no regular instructor, our bishop voluntarily undertook that arduous office. He patiently examined the abstracts of the principal works in theology, which, by his advice they had made. He conversed with them with the freedom of a brother, while with parental attention he endeavoured to correct their errors, to cultivate their good qualities, and to mould their understandings and dispositions for the sacred office. He strictly examined their attainments when they applied for holy orders: and, in no case, ever consented to dispense with a single requisition of the canons. He had a great affection for his clergy. He loved them as the ministers of his Lord. He considered them as near and intimate relations. In every work he sought their co-operation. At the altar he loved to see them gathered around him; in his visitations, he wished one or more to accompany him: and in this feeling, he thought he was supported by the example of our Lord, who sent out his ministers by two and two.—In their concerns, even of the minutest nature, he felt an interest; and nothing was omitted to befriend them, that influence and exertion, counsel and liberality could do. His purse was open to all of them who needed. To some he gave, to others lent. Their families were dear to him. And, whether the last moments of a wife were to be *soothed*, or a beloved child *educated for usefulness*, he was always ready. To serve the Clergy he never spared himself. He “*laboured more abundantly*” than they all. He was more than their Bishop; their friend and father. It is much to be regretted that he never addressed a charge to his Clergy. This composition, he conceived, claimed more than ordinary excellence, and his multiplied duties did not afford him sufficient leisure. But in his *annual addresses to the convention*, which were published, he brought to the view of the Clergy and the Church in general, the most suitable cautions and directions. In one of these addresses, it will be recollected, he recom-

mended with affectionate earnestness, the steady observance of family worship.

The *General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, was held in Philadelphia, in May, 1814. As it was a time of war, he would have to go by land, and return at a sickly season, through a sickly country: but his presence was a duty, and private feeling and convenience were not regarded. He returned in August, and was sick. With this experience of the hazard of a return to our climate at Midsummer, he again went during the last spring to New York, to attend upon the general Convention. Here his reputation was gloriously consummated. He never appeared to more advantage. His influence seems to have pervaded both houses of the Convention. The establishment of a seminary, *under the patronage and controul of the whole Church, for the education of candidates for the ministry*, was a measure attempted by him without success at the preceding general Convention, and still anxiously desired. He had to encounter strong opposition, but he prevailed: and by conciliating suggestions, induced a change of opinion in some of those who had differed from him. He felt on this occasion the most lively gratitude and joy, and considering the measure of vital importance to the Church, he declared that its adoption was among the happiest events of his life. The Theological Seminary has received benefactions to a considerable amount; and should it meet with success, (of which at present there is good hope,) it will be a splendid monument to the memory of our Bishop. This one act may claim for him the gratitude of the whole Church to the latest posterity.

But, (to return to the narrative,) in about six weeks, from the time of his departure, our Bishop was again with us, in the exercise of his duties, with his accustomed activity. On the last day of his health he was at Sullivan's Island, occupied with the concerns of the Church. He attended to the small as well as the great; and it was pleasant to see him, who had so lately been a chief in our chief Ecclesiastical Council, directing his mind to the minutest

matters in the economy of a small place of worship: that its seats might be arranged so as best to accommodate the congregation, and to afford a proper situation for the military stationed at that island. His last visit, and that within a few hours of his sickness, was to the chamber of a bereaved mother. There is reason to believe that the seeds of his disease were received in the house of a clergyman, whose family in sickness and trouble he frequently visited, though he had expressed a conviction of the hazard to his health in doing so. He went to the grave of the wife; and, in true affection for an absent brother, patiently remained till all was done*. His illness was too severe to admit much conversation. But the greatest sufferings could not disturb the serenity of his mind. To his attendants he was uniformly kind. Having made a sudden exclamation from pain, he immediately observed, ‘Do not suppose that I murmur:’ and, to calm the bosom of affection, he referred to that passage of Scripture, “*Be still then, and know that I am God*†.” The 33d chapter of Job having been read to him, he remarked, ‘*I do not know whether, (as there expressed^k,) my flesh will ever again be fresher than a child’s; but this I know, I am just where I would be, in the hands of God.*’ He declared that his trust in God had never been shaken; that he knew that he should carry to God at death much sinfulness, but that is covered; he said a second time, with emphasis, ‘That is covered.’ Adverting to his particular disease, he said, ‘*Why is it that the stranger is subject to this calamity from which the native is exempt?—but God hath set the one over against the other*‡.’ On his last day, he was asked what I have mentioned in the beginning of this discourse: and also, ‘With what subject are your thoughts now employed?’—and he replied, ‘that I would endeavour to be a more perfect being.’ ‘But you do not depend on your own merits

* The last letters he wrote were to the two absent relatives of the deceased, to comfort them under their affliction.

† Ps. xlv. 10.

^k Ver. 25.

‡ Ecclesiastes vii. 14.

for salvation!' 'Oh no! I rest on the Saviour;' or words to that effect. He quoted from one of our Collects, the words '*Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy:*'—and thus commented—'increase, not only increase—but multiply.' His last quotation from Scripture was, "*God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*¹," expressive, as I suppose, of his confidence in that Divine faithfulness, on which the Patriarchs rested, which is everlasting, from generation to generation. As his end drew near, he was silent and still. His eyes looked lovelier, as if fixed on the angels ready to receive his spirit. His countenance had the expression of his happiest and most pious moments. It was turned from earth and friendship, unto heaven and God. "*Mark—the upright: for the end of that man is peace*^m."

The great and peculiar characteristic of Bishop Dehon was devotedness to God and His Ministry. In this cause he left his quiet home, his select friends, his favourite studies and contemplations, and entered into general society, for which he had no taste, and on a life of perpetual activity, which was uncongenial both with his disposition and his habits. In this cause he spared no sacrifice, and declined no difficulty and danger; he was willing to spend and be spent, and would allow nothing to divert him from it. But his conduct, in the other relations of life, ought not to pass unnoticed; for in them also, "*he was faithful unto death.*" As a good citizen it was his uniform practice to call on the Chief Magistrate of the State, soon after his election, and express devout wishes for the prosperity of his Administration. He prayed, and requested his friends to pray for his Country. He suggested the propriety of several of the Fasts and Thanksgivings ordered by the Civil Authority. In the possibility of a separation of the union he had the solicitude of a true patriot. He expressed for the Father of his Country filial respect and affection, in a Sermon preached on the Sunday after the intelligence of his death*. He pa-

¹ Matt. xxii. 32.

^m Ps. xxxvii. 37.

* The Sermon on the death of Washington is not in this collection.
Eng. Ed.

tronized important literary institutions and publications, not to avail himself of their advantages, for he had not sufficient leisure; but because he considered them valuable to the country. He rejoiced in the establishment of the Free Schools, and when their suppression was thought probable, conversed on the subject with men of influence. He has left, in print, two judicious plans for securing to the poor of this city* the knowledge and the Ordinances of Religion, and he went into its bye-lanes for the express purpose of making himself acquainted with their condition. To his suggestion it is owing, under God, that the unhappy beings, who have their abode in the Poor-House, have the Gospel steadily preached unto them. He contemplated, with the feelings of a Patriot and a Christian, the *moral* condition of a large class of our population †; and he believed, that it was not only a duty to instruct them in Christianity; but that the safety of the country required that they should be instructed, not by the ignorant and the visionary, but by regular Ministers, in the pure principles of that religion which commands servants to be obedient to their own mastersⁿ, and contented in that state of life in which God had placed them. In short, though the Church was the proper field of Bishop Dehon, few men have done more for the country.

In the intercourse of society he was courteous to all, but he flattered nobody. He was as tender of the feelings and reputation of others, as of his own, and equally so in their absence and presence. He was careful to avoid giving, and very slow to take, offence. The wrong must be obvious, and intended, before he would censure it, and then it was evident that he was discharging a painful duty. He declared his sentiments in relation to wicked conduct without fear or affection; and when it was necessary, with the bold-

* One of these had relation to Sunday Schools, and the other to the erection of a Church, in which special accommodation should be made for the poor.

† The Slaves.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 5.

ness of an Apostle, to the offender, to his face. He had charity for those whom he conceived to be in error. But he never could be seduced by a specious liberality, to do any thing which might reasonably be considered a compromise of his own principles. ‘*Charity,*’ (he used to remark) ‘*requires me to bear with the errors of my brother, not to adopt or to approve them.*’ He was forgiving to those who had injured him. If he suffered long, he was still kind; when he was reviled, he imitated his Lord and Master, and reviled not again; and when unjustly accused, ‘he answered not.’ He was most beneficent. He attached no importance to the possession of wealth, except so far as it would enable him to go more about and do more good. He had for many years appropriated one tenth of his income to charitable purposes; but latterly he gave one seventh;—observing, that Christians ought to do more than the Hebrews did, and that this proportion seemed to be suggested by the circumstance, that God required of man one seventh of his time. But he found reasons for giving away still more. He lent sums which could not be returned. He never laid up money from his income, and he never wished to do so; for he used to say, ‘he had never wanted, and could not doubt the future good providence of God towards him.’ In this way, he had sources of happiness, far more valuable than lands and houses. He had the blessings of the widow, and the affection unto death of the tradesmen, whom he had assisted in business; and of the youths whom he had educated. Often, as he contemplated the embarrassments of an honest man, would a sigh that he could not relieve him, escape his benevolent heart, and he would say, ‘Ten thousand dollars would not be missed by a wealthy man, and how much happiness would it here dispense*.’ Thus liberal himself, he suffered no favourable opportunity to escape for exciting the libera-

* His feeling for others was pleasingly exhibited in his last sickness. Lavender being offered to him, he thought immediately of the distress of a sick person, and desired that a bottle should be sent to her, observing, ‘I have felt much refreshed by it.’

lity of others. And he enforced the claims of charity on the affluent, with a delicacy which was almost irresistible. To his influence, the pious and the poor are indebted for several generous benefactions and legacies, as honourable to the givers, as they have been valuable to the receivers. In the near relations of life, he appeared with uniform tenderness of heart, and stedfastness of Christian principle. He was a dutiful son, a kind brother, an affectionate husband and parent, and the most generous and faithful of friends. Of his mother, who spent with him at Newport most of her time, he delighted to converse. He often thought of her in his meditations, for at such times the expression would escape him; ‘Spirit of my mother! where art thou?’ He cherished most fondly the hope of meeting her in heaven. He was also most tenderly attached to the memory of an early friend*, with whom he had passed several years of close and uninterrupted intimacy: and it was delightful to listen to his glowing description of their connection, and the warmth of his expressions on the value of friendship. Of his feelings towards the dearest of his relatives, I would that I were allowed to speak, for they gave rise to some of his most interesting remarks. Blessed be God!—they will afford unspeakable comfort to the heart to whom they belong.

Of the powers of his understanding, it may be observed, that they were of the first order; for in the various situations in which he was called to act, he always held the first rank. His talents were not so generally noticed as his virtues, and as those of other men who were really his inferiors: for they were concealed in a great measure by his uncommon diffidence; and also, if I may so speak, by his moral excellencies; just as the warmth of the sun causes mankind to forget for a time the majesty of his beams. His imagination was lively, and in early life had been cultivated. His memory was remarkably quick and retentive.

* Mr. Francis Channing, his room mate and only intimate companion at College.

His judgment was eminently sound. His opinions, on subjects not connected with his profession, were seldom incorrect, and were eagerly sought by his friends. He had a complete command of his intellectual resources, and could use them with equal advantage in public and in his study. His mind had an energy which was not to be controlled by the fatigue of the body. In the services of the Sanctuary, long protracted, when his body was ready to sink, his mind was still in full exercise; and after a tedious journey he could apply himself during the greater part of the night to the preparation of a Sermon, or to a conversation maintained with his usual ability. His attainments in knowledge were extraordinary, considering, that from twenty-one years of age, he had been occupied with the active duties of a large congregation, and he was continually adding to his stock of improvement. His studies being interrupted during the day, were often continued through the greater part of the night; and it appears, in some instances, to the dawn of morning*.

I will now briefly state what I conceive to be prominent excellencies in the character of Bishop Dehon. In the first place, inflexibility. He was careful to ascertain the right course of conduct. He never acted precipitately. He reflected long, and consulted books and wise men. But when his opinion was once settled—to adopt the remark, made of him on a particular occasion, by the excellent Bishop White—‘Nothing could move him.’ This rendered his conduct remarkably uniform and steady: for, on all questions of importance, his opinion had been settled. He

* By unwearied application to his studies, he had injured his constitution which was not naturally very strong. As he was exposed to frequent interruption during the day, his studies were protracted to the hour of midnight. I have heard him say, that the dawn of morning frequently found him at his books. He did not approve of midnight studies, yet he could not overcome his love of conversing with the oracles of God, and the living monuments of the mighty dead, in the calm and silent hours of night. May I not say that this was the only instance, in which he practised what he disapproved? *Dr. C.*

was precisely the person described by the ancient moralist :

‘ ——— Fixed and steady to his trust,
 ‘ Inflexible to truth, and obstinately just.’

But no one was ever more accommodating to the inclinations of others, on occasions that did not involve moral principle. He united in an eminent degree stedfastness of purpose with gentleness of manner, the ‘ *suivater in modo,*’ and the ‘ *fortiter in re.*’ His character had the ornament of meekness. The cares of life, and the vexations inseparable from an intercourse with mankind, were not permitted to ruffle his temper. In circumstances similar to those in which Moses had been placed, he was acknowledged by all to be like him indeed, very meek*.

Another excellence in his character was discretion. He knew when it was proper to act or not to act, to appear or to be silent. This quality made him sometimes appear unsocial, but it rendered him most valuable in his public employments. The members of his congregation could consult him on the most delicate questions with a certainty that his prudence would let nothing escape him. His sense of gratitude ought to be mentioned, for it was peculiarly lively. He was grateful for the smallest favours. He seemed never to have forgotten the little attentions of hospitality which he received on his first visit to S. Carolina, and took every opportunity to return the kindness to the persons themselves, and their connections. For the lesser comforts of life, which are often unnoticed by the pious, he was in the habit of expressing his gratitude to the Almighty Giver.

* In illustration of his self-command the following circumstance is related. Many years ago it became necessary to extract from his neck a wen of considerable size, and the surgeon wished to employ two persons to hold him. But he refused, and during a painful operation, in which the slightest motion would, it is said, have cost him his life, exhibited a composure which Dr. Warren declared had never been surpassed. It ought to be added, that he was perfectly aware of the hazard of the operation. He has alluded to it in one of his Sermons, vol. II. p. 406.

The healthy air, the pleasant walk, the sublime scene of Sullivan's Island, would spontaneously turn his affections to Heaven, and excite the praises of his lips in that devout hymn of thanksgiving, the 'Te Deum.' His character was strictly formed on Christian principles *. He referred every thing to the Scriptures. He was accustomed to ask himself, How would my Saviour have acted under such circumstances? and in this way resolved several questions of the most intricate nature. In the various situations in which he was placed through life, he could always find some precept to guide, and some promise to comfort his heart. It was this complete knowledge of the Scriptures, and skill in applying them, which rendered him so valuable a counsellor in the time of temptation and trouble. He could not be satisfied with a cold performance of duty, but wished, in the service of God and his fellow-creatures, to do all he could, and to become every day more and more capable of usefulness. He placed before himself the standard of Scriptural perfection, and in dependence on the assistance of the Spirit of God, pursued it with ardour and perseverance even unto death. To be holy was his ruling desire, and was the last wish which he expressed. It was the consciousness of his distance from this standard, which rendered him so humble and condescending. Of his faults, (for who is he that sinneth not?) I know more from his own declarations than from observation. They were such as persons in general would not have noticed, but they seldom escaped the attention of his own bright perception.

In his person he was above the middle height, and though not slender, yet by no means robust. His eye had the greatest sweetness of expression, and his countenance was expressive chiefly of settled conviction on great points, and of inward peace. When he smiled, it bore the features of benevolence, and when he looked grave, of piety.

I have thought, my friends, that this particular account of

* He thought that the religion founded on feeling rather than principle, was usually inconsistent and short lived.

a faithful man would be useful. He was placed by the Providence of God in a variety of situations, and in all of them acted well. In youth and manhood, in sickness and health, in adversity and prosperity, in private and public life, in the world, in the Church, and at the hour of death, let us be followers of him, as he was of Christ. This career of usefulness is now arrested by the hand of death. This bright example lives only in memory. Those lessons of wisdom, to which you listened with increasing delight, and which you fondly hoped your children's children might enjoy, are now hushed in the silence of the grave. The widow and the fatherless have lost their protector and patron. The hopes of our Church are scattered to the winds. Surely this is a time to weep and be sad—to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; to come into His tabernacle and fall low on our knees before His footstool, and to say, "*We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly; to us belongeth confusion of face as at this day: but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness.*"

Gentlemen of the Vestry of St. Michael's Church; I embrace the present occasion, in behalf of the Clergy and the Church in general, to thank you for the generosity which, overlooking your particular interest, and seeking the good of the whole Church, added your request to that of the Convention, that Dr. Dehon would accept the Episcopate. We thank you for your endeavours to promote his comfort while he lived, and for the many affectionate tokens of respect which you have evinced for his memory*. Under

* Dan. ix. 5.

* Among other expressions of their respect and affection, the Vestry resolved that the corpse should be buried beneath the altar, that a slab with his name and age should cover the spot, and that a monument should be erected to his memory in the most conspicuous place in the Church. The standing Committee of the Diocese, in their resolutions on the occasion, commended the Church, as under a most heavy bereavement, to the prayers of all the Bishops, and of Episcopalians in general. The '*Society for the Relief of the Widows and Orphans of the Episcopal Clergy,*' the '*Society for the Advancement of Christianity in*

your present feelings I can wish you no greater consolation than that you may be the honoured instruments of giving to your Church another such minister. But where will you find such a rare combination of mind and manners, of knowledge and goodness, of zeal and prudence? May God pour upon you the influences of His Holy Spirit, that you “*may perceive what things you ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same.*”

My friends of St. Michael’s Congregation; On this occasion, while you weep for yourselves and your children, you have the sympathy of the whole diocese, of other congregations in this city, of many persons in other states, and of the venerable Fathers, the Bishops of our Church. To have had for several years the services, the example, and the prayers in your behalf, of such a man of God, is no common privilege. May you be suitably thankful to God; and as ‘*much has been given you,*’ may it appear in the end, that ‘*you have profited much.*’

My Brethren of the Clergy; Our own sorrows are swallowed up by our solicitude for the Church. We tremble for the ark of God, for its high priest is removed. We are afraid that the Sheep will be scattered, now that the Shepherd is smitten. We feel as if we would call on our Elijah, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof, to come back to us; to leave his glory, to share our cares and labours. The Church is now committed to us. We cannot do all we wish, let us do all we can. Thanks be to God! her principles and institutions cannot fail to commend her to the affection and admiration of the wise and good. Thanks be to God! she has already enlisted in her cause in this

South Carolina,’ and the ‘*Bible Society,*’ entered into resolutions expressive of their deep sorrow and sincere respect and regard. The three Episcopal Churches in Charleston were hung in mourning, and that of the German Lutherans, who also addressed a letter of condolence to the Vestry of St. Michael’s; and many persons of both sexes in this state, and in Savannah, put on black. The body was carried to its last abode by his Clergy, and the grave was filled up by the labours of the Vestry, and other respectable citizens.

Diocese, intelligent and virtuous laymen, who would be a blessing to any Church. Thanks be to God! He is on our side—for He has promised to be “*a wall of fire round about her,*” and “*a glory in the midst of her*”^p; and if God be for us, who can be against us? To despair of the Church would be criminal. Let us guard her venerable fabric as our most sacred inheritance. Let us never consent to remove the smallest part of it, either to please our friends, or to conciliate our enemies. Let us be united ourselves, and make it a chief care that the people should be of one heart and of one mind. Let us gather up the maxims of our departed Bishop: and, in the light of his example, cherish more and more the Apostolical faith, the piety without enthusiasm, the zeal according to knowledge, and the manners of the primitive Christians. Let us remember the time is short, and work diligently while it is called to-day. Let us always look to God for direction: for, though St. Paul should plant, and Apollos water, God only can give the increase. O ye ministers of the Lord! O ye servants of the Lord! pray without ceasing for the peace and prosperity of the Church.

Zech. ii. 5.

THE END.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY R. GILBERT,

ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

WORKS IN DIVINITY.

PUBLISHED BY C. AND J. RIVINGTON.

1. **THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER**, with **NOTES** Explanatory, Practical, and Historical, from approved writers of the Church of England, selected and arranged by the Right Rev. **RICHARD MANT**, D.D. Lord Bishop of Down. Third Edition. In one large Volume, Quarto, price £1 16s. boards; or on Royal Paper, £3 12s.

2. The same Work, with Notes, selected from the Quarto Edition. In two large Volumes, 8vo. Price £1 4s. in boards, or on royal paper, 11. 16s.

3. **A CONCORDANCE** to the **HOLY BIBLE**; to which is added a **GEOGRAPHICAL INDEX**, with the Calendar and Table of Lessons; designed to accompany any Quarto Edition of the Bible, and adapted to the Maps and Notes of the **FAMILY BIBLE**, published under the Direction of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge. Edited by **James W. BELLAMY**, M.A. Rector of the United Parishes of St. Mary, Abchurch, and St. Laurence Pountney, and Prebendary of St. Paul's. Price 5s. on Medium, and 7s. on Royal Paper; also in Royal 8vo. Price 8s.

4. **THE OLD TESTAMENT**, arranged on the Basis of Lightfoot's Chronicle, in Historical and Chronological Order, in such Manner, that the Books, Chapters, Psalms, Prophecies, &c. may be read as one connected History, in the very Words of the authorized Translation, with Notes. To the above are added, Six Indexes. By the Rev. **GEORGE TOWNSEND**, M.A. of Trinity College, Cambridge. In two very large Volumes, 8vo. 11. 16s.

Extract from Mr. Horne's Introduction to the Critical Study of the Holy Scriptures, vol. ii. p. 402.

"The writer of these pages, on the completion of the present work, proposed to himself to attempt a harmony of the entire Bible. This laborious undertaking has been happily rendered unnecessary as it respects the Old Testament, by Mr. Townsend's Arrangement. This beautifully printed and carefully executed work, is indispensably necessary to those who are preparing for the sacred office. The notes are very appropriate, and possess the rare merit of compressing a great variety of valuable information into a small compass."

5. **THE NEW TESTAMENT**, arranged in Chronological and Historical Order, (in such manner that the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Acts, may be read as one connected History.) The Gospels on the Basis of the Harmonies of Lightfoot, Doddridge, Pilkington, Newcome, and Michaelis—the Account of the Resurrection, on the Authorities of West, Townson, and Cransfield. The Epistles are inserted in their places, and divided according to the Apostles' Arguments. With copious Notes on many of the principal Subjects in Theology. By the same Author, in two large Volumes, 8vo. price £2 in boards.

6. **A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE**, confirmed by References to the Texts of Holy Scripture, compared with the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies of the Church of England; and illustrated by Extracts from the chief of those Works which received the Sanction of Public Authority, from the time of the Reformation to the final Revision of the established Formularies. By the Rev. **E. J. BURROW**, D.D. F.R. and L.S. 3 vols. 12mo. 1£ 1s. †

7. **AN ATTEMPT TO ILLUSTRATE** those **ARTICLES** of the **CHURCH OF ENGLAND** which the Calvinists improperly consider as Calvinistical, in eight Sermons preached before the University of Oxford, in the year 1804, at the Lecture founded by **J. Bampton**, M.A. Canon of Salisbury; with copious Notes. By the Most Rev. **RICHARD LAURENCE**, LL.D. Archbishop of Cashel. 8vo. 12s.

8. **CONTEMPLATIONS** on the **LAST DISCOURSES** of our **BLESSED SAVIOUR** with his Disciples, as recorded in the Gospel of St. John. By the Rev. **JOHN BREWSTER**, M.A. Rector of Egglecliffe, Durham. 8vo. 10s. 6d.





